Editor’s Note

Joseph Gelfer

This edition of JMMS offers an intriguing mix of papers, providing an excellent example of the diversity of the study of men, masculinities and religion.

Björn Krondorfer starts off with an examination of the confessional writings of National Socialist perpetrator Oswald Pohl. After his imprisonment for war crimes, Pohl converted to Catholicism and published the conversion narrative Credo: Mein Weg zu Gott (Credo: My Path to God). Krondorfer questions whether genocidal perpetrators are capable of genuine confessional writings. Reading the gendered nature of Pohl’s Credo, Krondorfer goes on to argue that religion assisted in negotiating a crisis of postwar German masculinity. Interested readers of German are directed to several books related to the Holocaust edited by Krondorfer: Das Vermächtnis annehmen: Kulturelle und biographische Zugänge zum Holocaust: Beiträge aus den USA und Deutschland, co-edited with B. Huhnke (Psychosozial Verlag, 2002); Von Gott reden im Land der Täter: Theologische Stimmen der dritten Generation seit der Shoah, co-edited with Katharina von Kellenbach and Norbert Reck (Wissenschaftlicher Buchverlag, 2001); Mit Blick auf die Täter: Fragen an die deutsche Theologie nach 1945, co-edited with Katharina von Kellenbach and Norbert Reck (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006).

In his article, Neil Pembroke engages “narratives of silence” in a spirituality of fathering, framed by the concept of “availability” as developed by the Catholic French philosopher, Gabriel Marcel. Pembroke argues that these narratives of silence are not necessarily, as often reported, ones of withdrawal and absence; instead they may follow three positive modalities: restraint, self-giving, and listening. Interested readers are directed to Pembroke’s recent works, Renewing Pastoral Practice: Trinitarian Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counselling (Ashgate, 2006) and Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity: Psychological, Contemplative, and Moral Challenges in Christian Living (Haworth Pastoral Press, 2007).

Peter Bray’s article offers the unusual combination of William Shakespeare and Stan Grof’s concept of “spiritual emergency.” Bray argues that the death of his son and father caused Shakespeare to undergo a series of transformative spiritual emergency events, which are traceable within the text of Hamlet; these events provide a lens through which to view masculine coping mechanisms for grief and loss.

Our final paper from Anton Karl Kozlovic examines how masculinity functions within the biblical cinema of Cecil B. DeMille. Kozlovic argues that much of DeMille’s trademark cinematic style was based on a particular type of macho masculinity that manifest not just in DeMille’s biblical characters but also in his directorial methods and personal values.
The book review section contains three reviews. Robert J. Myles looks at Philip Culbertson, Margaret Agee and Cabrini ‘Ofa Makasiale’s edited collection, *Penina Uliuli: Contemporary Challenges in Mental Health for Pacific Peoples* which includes chapters focusing on constructions of the Pacific male body. Saheed Aderinto reads Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell’s edited collection, *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*. Interested readers should refer back to the first issue of *JMMS* which contains a reprint from this volume with a specifically religious focus: Frank A. Salamone’s “Hausa Concepts of Masculinity and the ‘Yan Daudu.” Finally, Nathan Abrams brings the issue to a climax, as it were, by pondering some of the religious dimensions that might have been explored in Murat Aydemir’s, *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity, Meaning*.

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A Perpetrator’s Confession: Gender and Religion in Oswald Pohl’s Conversion Narrative

Björn Krondorfer

Ideally, Christian confessional writings are a public testimony, in which a sinner exposes his shameful past to others, namely to God and the public, so that a reconciliation and transformation can occur. This article pursues the question of whether genocidal perpetrators are capable of such a confession, using the example of Oswald Pohl’s conversion narrative, Credo: My Path to God. Pohl had overseen the economic exploitation of slave laborers in the Nazi concentration camps. While in Allied imprisonment after the war, he converted to Catholicism. This article analyzes Credo’s religious and gendered rhetoric within the larger political discourse of postwar Germany. Commenting on the conspicuous absence of women in Pohl’s confessional testimony, I argue that religion assisted in negotiating a crisis of postwar German masculinity.

On February 12, 1950, in the American War Crime Prison of Landsberg (Bavaria), the former Nazi leader Oswald Pohl officially converted to Catholicism. Shortly after his conversion, he published Credo: Mein Weg zu Gott (Credo: My Path to God), a small booklet containing his public confession. In this largely apologetic text, Pohl presents himself as a new man, who, purged of his sins, has received God’s grace. In this article, I will take a closer look at select aspects of this confessional narrative. I will pay attention specifically to the interplay of religious and gendered rhetoric, which assisted in the attempt at normalizing a National Socialist (NS)-perpetrator and at portraying Pohl as a decent human being. The essay will proceed in three steps: After a short biographical sketch, I will first show that it took the collaborative effort of the accused Pohl and his Catholic prison chaplain to turn a religious conversion into a public testimony of a Nazi perpetrator; second, I argue that the absence of women in Credo is not coincidental but a central element of confessional writings in which men try to take account of their past selves; third, I will suggest that the religious rhetoric of Credo negotiates a crisis of postwar German masculinity.

Pohl and his Credo

Born in 1892 into a Protestant family, Pohl grew up in a home of “true religiosity” following the “evangelical-reformed faith tradition” (Pohl, 1950, p. 17). As a member of the National Socialist movement, he joined the SS in 1934 through the recruitment efforts of Heinrich Himmler, who had been impressed by Pohl’s
administrative and organizational skills. Pohl soon moved up and became the head of the WVHA, the Reich’s Economic-Administrative Main Office. He was responsible for organizing the industrial production within the concentration camp system, building and supervising a complex administrative web between the SS, the armament industry and private firms (see Allen, 2000; 2002; Schulte, 2001). Between 1942 and 1945, Pohl oversaw the entire workforce of concentration camp inmates, including the economic utilization of personal possessions of the exterminated Jews, such as their clothing, gold teeth and hair. Arrested in 1946, he was sentenced to death at the Nuremberg trials in 1947. After several failed appeals for clemency, he was executed by the Americans in the Landsberg prison on June 7, 1951, among the last seven Nazi war criminals hanged by the American military.1

In the summer of 1950, shortly after his conversion to Catholicism and before his execution by the Allies, Pohl wrote *Credo*. Among accused Nazi war criminals, it was not uncommon after 1945 to (re-)convert to Christianity or to renew their church membership while in Allied captivity. But rarely did anyone publicly repent. *Credo*, as a public confession and conversion story of a high-ranking Nazi perpetrator, is the exception to the rule. Nine thousand copies of this 75-page booklet were printed with the imprimatur of the Catholic Church in Munich.

On the surface, *Credo*, which is arranged in four chapters, is a political document that puts a conversion story into the service of reintegrating a perpetrator into postwar German society. For this reason, *Credo* has not sustained much attention in the scholarly community, and the few times it is briefly mentioned by historians, it is treated as a document without much historical value. *Credo*, however, is also a religious document that appropriates a Christian convention to address the question of German guilt. Its peculiar blend of religious, political and gendered rhetoric, which veils a perpetrator’s culpability, has not yet been analyzed.2

In terms of Christian conventions, *Credo* seems to satisfy the postwar German churches’ ambition to successfully re-convert a lost sheep among Nazi perpetrators, and it had the potential of becoming a popular devotional booklet. In general, within the spiritual economy of redemption, the person most to gain from a confession is the one furthest removed from God. The more abusive the power and pride of the former self, the more humbling the process of recovery of the new self. Since the dramatic suspense of a conversion story is based upon the assumption that public confessions are agonizing processes into which people are drawn by an irresistible force, *Credo* as the testimony of a high-ranking Nazi perpetrator seemed to fit the bill of an extraordinary conversion drama.

Instead, it failed. Why? First, if one of *Credo*’s aims was the political reintegration of a NS-perpetrator into postwar Germany, it did not succeed: Pohl’s life was not spared despite *Credo*’s moral attempt at normalizing him and at portraying him as a spiritually cleansed man not guilty of the charges brought against him by the Allied court. Second, due to its stilted and conventional style, *Credo* did not capture a wider popular imagination at the time of its publication, and today it remains largely unknown outside of a circle of specialized historians. Lastly, despite *Credo*’s deliberately suggestive links to Augustine’s masterful *Confessions*, the booklet does not measure up to the task of self-reflecting disclosure that the genre of Christian confessional writings exerts on sinners. As a male perpetrator, Pohl does
not open himself up to public moral scrutiny but, instead, engages in a discourse of
evasions. Credo, I suggest, must be read as a testimony of a Nazi perpetrator
employing the Christian confessional form during a transitional moment of
Germany’s restoration period. 3

A Public Testimony: Pohl and his Hagiographer

Pohl describes the crucial moment of his religious transformation in the following
words: “I was shaken to the depth of my soul. My eyes were able to see with more
clarity than before: They gazed into a new world. Before my inner face, something
marvelous passed by. Credo!” (Credo, p. 53). 4 This is the measured rhetoric of a
conversion story typical of the Christian confessional form. The soul is in profound
crisis and compelled to undergo a radical transformation; as a result, the sinner
discovers with unambiguous clarity the essence of what truly counts in the world—
true faith in the love of God. Similarly, Augustine deplors the state of his soul in his
Confessions: “Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart. You had pity on it when
it was at the bottom of the abyss... With your word, you pierced my heart, and I
loved you” (2.4.9; 10.6.8). 5 Taking his cues from Augustine’s confessional narrative,
Pohl writes:

The moment of transformation filled me with an ardent love. It is love that
counts. Indeed, love is the essence and main objective of Christianity.
Everything else is only a means to an end. Sermons and the gospels,
sacraments, fasting and praying—all of them are meant to educate us
towards love, to kindle love within us, to nourish, complete, strengthen,
purify and fortify love: the true love for God and our neighbors (Credo, pp.
57-58).

Oswald Pohl is credited as sole author of Credo, but it is fairly certain that he
did not write Credo by himself, but must have received active help from Karl
Morgenschweis, the official Catholic prison chaplain of Landsberg and fellow
German, who initiated Pohl into the Catholic faith. 6 A linguistic analysis of the text
reveals drastic stylistic differences. For example, in the fourth chapter we read about
the spiritual nature of humans:

The more a person knows about himself, or thinks he knows about himself,
the more he disappears to himself as a unified whole and clearly definable
entity... Herein lies the deepest meaning and the greatest riches of salvation:
to lift up the rationally endowed creature [Geschöpf] from the infinite
distance of his ontological powerlessness [Seinsohnmacht] and from the
abyssal forlornness of his sin to divine vitality, and thereby enable him to
join in the work of salvation. (Credo, pp. 53, 65)

It is unlikely that Pohl’s theologically untrained, thoroughly nationalistic and
bureaucratic mind could have penned those sentences. Elsewhere in Credo, a cruder
and remarkably different understanding of Christianity emerges, which mirrors more
closely Pohl’s soldierly mind. He ponders, for example, the “totalitarian claim” of
Christ’s teachings (p. 19), portrays his awakening to the Catholic faith as a “frontal
breakthrough” (*Frontaldurchbruch*), and speaks of the “new armor of faith” that helped him in his “battles” with doubt (p. 58). “After all, no one will blame an old soldier for being highly impressed by the strong love of order and authoritative leadership of the Catholic Church by which it distinguishes itself from all other Christian denominations: Order, unity, leadership and obedience all rest in the sphere of the military” (p. 60). The difference between these passages is striking and only a most credulous reader could claim that *Credo*’s ornate theological constructions were authored by Pohl himself.

As prison chaplain, Morgenschweis is Pohl’s hagiographer, whose task it is to normalize the extraordinary evil of a Nazi perpetrator by humanizing and Christianizing him. In his six-page Preface, which is an integral part of *Credo*, Morgenschweis identifies the booklet as an exemplary conversion/confession story. He establishes a theological and ideological framework that directs the reader’s gaze rather forcefully to a partisan interpretation. Morgenschweis describes Pohl as a confessing sinner, “a man full of energy, willpower and vigor.” He is a military “officer from top to toe,” a man of a “highly cultured mind and heart [*hohe Geistesbildung und Herzensbildung*], upright, honest and truthful.” “Pohl,” Morgenschweis reports, “lives like a monk in his cell, in prayer and sacrifice and where, whenever possible, he works and studies.” He is a man “filled with the ardent love of Christ,” who, as a new convert, has “entirely succumbed to God” and awaits “his fate” with calm composure. His poise is “testimony” to his “Haltung” (attitude), “which is the fruit of his total inner conversion to God and his homecoming to the Catholic Church” (*Credo*, p. 12f).

The saintly qualities ascribed to Pohl by Morgenschweis do not reside in any past miraculous deeds but in his present ordinariness. As hagiographer, Morgenschweis has to convince his audience that the true miracle of Pohl’s conversion is his human decency, in spite of the Allied trial at Nuremberg that condemned him to death. “As priest and pastoral counselor,” Morgenschweis argues, “I have the holy duty to portray Pohl in just the way as I have seen him as his spiritual father and soul-guide in the several years of direct intercourse [*Verkehr*] with him” (*Credo*, p. 12f). Morgenschweis portrays Pohl as his spiritually intimate Other. The term “intercourse” (translated literally but correctly from the German *Verkehr*) offers a linguistic clue for the intimacy of the devout exchange between confessor and confessant, between spiritual father and prodigal son, hagiographer and saint.

Because of the textually symbiotic relationship between Pohl as confessant and Morgenschweis as his confessor-*cum*-hagiographer, *Credo* must be approached as the creative product of confessional conversations between these two men. Oswald Pohl probably hoped for clemency leading to his eventual release and social reintegration. This hope was not far-fetched, given how persistently the Protestant and Catholic churches in postwar Germany kept appealing to the Allied forces to grant political amnesty to Nazi war criminals. Likewise, Morgenschweis must have hoped for clemency as well. He, too, wished to see his prodigal son reintegrated into German society. To this effect he kept defending Pohl’s reputation even long after his execution, claiming that only false accusations had brought him to the gallows. Pohl “was not responsible for the concentration camps and the annihilation of Jews,” Morgenschweis is reported to have said in 1965. In addition, Morgenschweis...
probably hoped to promote Catholic faith and to reinforce the claim that the churches have always kept their moral integrity, even in times of corrupt and corruptible secular powers, of which Nazism was as much a bad instance as communism and modernism.  

What *Credo* presents, then, is a truth that these two men consented to, and they felt confident enough to share it with the public. Indeed, Morgenschweis is very conscious of publicity, and in the opening page of his Preface he acknowledges that Pohl’s actual *Bekehrung* [conversion] —before *Credo* was written— “caused a great sensation in the public,” and he expects that the now available written conversion story [*Bekehrungsgeschichte*] will also “cause a great sensation.” Morgenschweis states that Pohl wanted to use “this writing to make public his acceptance into the Catholic Church,” “to renounce publicly his previous religious and ideological profession [*Bekenntnis*]” and “to declare publicly his belief [*Bekenntnis*] in the Catholic Church” (*Credo*, p. 9; emphasis B.K.). The prison chaplain insists from the very beginning on two important points: that *Credo* belongs to the tradition of conversion narratives [*Bekehrung*] and that, as a confession [*Bekenntnis*], it is truly a public testimony.

Morgenschweis’ main task, then, is to correctly frame the experience of the repentant sinner, and he does so theology through the form of a conversion miracle and, politically, through a normalizing discourse that trivializes guilt. In the 1950s, postwar West Germans felt they were ready to move on with their lives, yet they needed to figure out how to integrate their totalitarian and genocidal past with the current democratic and economic reconstruction efforts (cf. Schwarz, 1989). Especially vexing was the problem of the personal guilt of individual Germans (see Jaspers, 1947; Frei, 1999). How should a democratic society handle the thousands of people who had been active perpetrators or complicit in genocidal crimes? These people were, after all, colleagues, teachers, peers, friends, neighbors and family members. Morgenschweis and Pohl knew they had to address this issue. But they carefully avoided any admittance of severe wrongdoing. Although *Credo* does not deny that Pohl held a high position in the NS-regime, he is never called a perpetrator, and the crimes for which he was sentenced to death are not mentioned. What *Credo* tries to foreground, instead, is Pohl’s faith-induced tranquility. Shortly before his execution, Pohl received an apostolic benediction from the Pope (though somewhat by accident). As a man, he is portrayed as the national embodiment of a denazified but still conservative morality geared toward normalizing Germany’s place among the nations.

*Male Affections: Of Absent Wives and Mothers*

In 1942, Pohl married his second wife, Eleonore von Brüning, who, given her biography, must have been as convinced a Nazi as her husband (see Koch, 1988, pp. 83–91). Heinrich Himmler had a not so inconsequential hand in bringing Oswald and Eleonore together, and their marriage ceremony took place in Himmler’s military quarters in East Prussia (Schulte, 2001, p. 40). Eleonore stood by her husband’s side after his arrest. The forty-one-year-old Eleonore, writes Schmitz-Köster (2007), is “determined to remain loyal to Pohl … He is her husband, and she would never betray ‘a German soldier.’ She writes this line in her notes during the first postwar year” (p. 158).
Eleonore contributed four drawings to *Credo*, each of them illustrating a major theme of the four chapters that follow Morgenschweis’ Preface. Three of these black-and-white drawings present a pensive male figure (presumably representing Pohl), deeply immersed in contemplation. The first shows a young male figure in Navy uniform bending his head before crosses marking the burial sites of German soldiers on an island in the Pacific Ocean. It illustrates in visually-condensed form the emotional theme of chapter 1, which is titled: “Protestant Youth and Years of Travel.” In it, Pohl traces his Protestant upbringing within the context of the Great War of 1914-1918. With sentimental simplicity, he asks large religious questions about God and Christianity (“How can Christianity claim to be the only true and hence redemptive religion on this earth? ... Who, after all, is Christ?” [*Credo*, p. 18f]). The chapter is organized around the juxtaposition of powers that had guided him in his childhood (God, the Bible, his mother’s piety) and the distress he experienced as a young man returning from the war in 1919: skepticism, religious dissatisfaction, and a growing distance from Christianity.

Eleonore’s next drawing illustrates the title and theme of chapter 2, “Between Faith and Disbelief.” Here, we see a stylized figure, a silhouette, standing uneasily on a path that seems to pull him back to the sword and books on the bottom half of the picture, but also drawing him to the sun and heavenly planets on the top half (the sun, we assume, symbolizing spiritually-charged hope; note, though, that the sun was also a Nazi symbol for the reawakening of the German nation). Pohl is caught between different ideologies and beliefs. In this chapter, Pohl gives an account of his professional career in the SS. He does not hide the fact that he had supported National Socialism from early on, but portrays himself as a task-oriented man of the military (“*Berufssoldat*”) who was “politically untrained and inexperienced” (*Credo*, p. 29). He tries to establish a sense of respectability by taking, on the one hand, responsibility for his career choices and, on the other, trying to present himself without blame in regard to the murderous NS-policies. Religious discourse helps him to perform this straddling act. His career decision to join the SS is embedded in a discussion about the tension between faith in the Christian God and in the Nazi “*Gottgläubigkeit*” (God-Believers; p. 30f), the term Nazis, and especially the SS, adopted to indicate their religious classification after leaving the churches. Pohl left the Protestant church in 1936. He claims that the category *gottgläubig* was just a formality for his personnel files: “True religious feeling, when it saturated a person, did not suffocate even underneath the black uniform [of the SS]” (Credo, p. 34).
In her third drawing for the chapter, “Return to God,” Eleonore assumes the perspective of someone peeking into a dark and empty prison cell. There, a figure on a plank bed is holding his head in his hands. Eleonore framed the whole picture by a thorny wreath decorated with one small rose bud—no doubt a symbolic representation of the rosary and possibly Christ’s crown of thorns. In this chapter, Pohl—now a prisoner in Landsberg—wonders aloud about the extent of his guilt, but never admits having played an instrumental role in the extermination of Jews. The chapter opens with the ominous sentence, “Then came the atrocious year of 1945”—a frighteningly remarkable opening line if one realizes that Pohl refers to his captivity after the war but says nothing about the victims of Nazi terror or about his brutal policy of the industrial utilization of concentration camp inmates. After the collapse of Nazi Germany, Pohl sees himself as a victim of the victor’s justice of the Allied forces. He admits that he feels partially responsible for the “moral morass” (Credo, p. 42) and “moral failure” (p. 45) of the Nazi ideology, but maintains that he is personally innocent of any crimes. “I had never beaten anyone to death,” he writes, “nor did I encourage others to do so” (p. 43).
Eleonore’s fourth drawing is less literal and plays with Catholic religious imagery. She depicts a pastoral setting of a shepherd in a black habit surrounded by a flock of sheep and cradling a lamb in his arms—a metaphoric rendition of the last chapter’s title, “In the Bosom of the True Catholic Church.” Here, Pohl describes his spiritual homecoming. The longest of the four chapters, it is the least autobiographical. It is a pastiche of moralizing proclamations, Catholic dogma, theological citations (especially of Catholic theologian Karl Adam) and religious trifle. Pohl’s autobiographical insertions no longer dwell on the past but are very much in the present, centering on the official conversion, the moment when “I made my life’s confession to our prison chaplain ... and experienced the zenith of my life” (Credo, p. 66). Pohl presents himself purified, calm and resigned. He is beyond the passions and follies of this world and has put his trust entirely into the Catholic Church and God. The famous line from the opening of Augustine’s Confessions is deliberately placed in the text, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (p. 69). A little later, in another conscious reference to the confessional tradition with its dual nature of confessing sins and praising God, the chapter’s very last words read, “Te Deum laudamus” —God, we praise you (p. 70).

Together, these chapters do not constitute a memoir but an account of Pohl’s religious and moral self-questioning through a mélange of select autobiographical details, theological and political musings and various citations of Catholic authorities. The scant literary value of the text corresponds well to the pathos-filled aesthetics of Eleonore’s drawings, which bear traces of the “naturalist, idyllic style” of Nazi aesthetics (Schmitz-Köster, 2007, p. 43). They are the product of a commercial designer with a personal and ideological agenda. The lack of artistic merit, however, is compensated by Eleonore’s ability of distillation, condensing visually the psychodynamics of Credo’s religious-political rhetoric. Her illustrations are significant nevertheless, because they reinforce Credo’s core sentiment: Pohl is to be imagined as a lonely, contemplative and decent man, whose soul does not find peace until it rests in God.

Nowhere in Credo is Eleonore credited as the illustrator, which is all the more surprising if one recalls how loyal she remained to Pohl after the war and also learns that she was trained as a graphic designer. Her own biography is anything but uncomplicated. Born in 1904 to Richard Holtz and Hedwig Müller, Eleonore’s father died shortly after her birth. After some schooling in housekeeping and stenography, she arrived in Berlin at the age of 17 and eventually got a secretarial position at the Walter de Gruyter publishing house, where she later worked as a graphic designer. Shortly after starting her formal education at the Hamburg school of arts and crafts, she met her first husband Karl Mass (fifteen years her senior); in 1933, she married her second husband Rüther von Brüning (twenty-eight years her senior). After the birth of her second child, von Brüning died. A love affair with Ludwig Gniss led to yet another pregnancy, but after the break-up, Eleonore decided to give birth to her third child, Heilwig, in a home of the Lebensborn, a SS-organization for “Aryan” mothers of “pure blood.” She also joined the NSDAP (the National Socialist German Workers’ Party) in 1937, where she eventually met Oswald Pohl (see Schmitz-Köster, 2007; for the Lebensborn, see Lilienthal, 2003).
Not a word about her life is found in Credo. Not credited as an artist, she also disappears as a wife in this confessional text. She is entirely absent. And so are all the other intimate “others” of Pohl. His father is as absent as are his seven siblings. His children are not mentioned in Credo, and neither is his first (divorced) wife. Constructed as a man’s spiritual self-examination, Credo leaves no room for any private talk about relatives.

Since Credo is not an autobiography, the nonappearance of his family members is not entirely unwarranted. However, there are many reasons why at least his children and his wives would have deserved an appearance in the text, not least because all of them had helped Pohl to survive in hiding after the war for over a year. After his arrest on May 27, 1946, Pohl kept in contact with them as much as possible under prison restrictions; Eleonore must have felt especially close to him, given her drawings that visualize well the gendered and religious rhetoric of the text.

The total absence of intimate others in Credo, especially of his former and current wives, calls for some explanation. The nonappearance may, on one level, simply demonstrate that male confessional writings generally resist the incorporation of women (in the Confessions, for example, Augustine’s new Christian self can be born again only through the displacement of all real women, especially sexually active women). Women are perceived as disrupting a man’s immersion in spiritual self-examination. Because they embody the realm of the trivial—that is, of home and bed, both of which obstruct the spiritual sphere the confessing man seeks to enter—women are omitted or relegated to the margins of a text.

On another level, it is conceivable that Morgenschweis, too, had an interest in silencing Pohl’s wives since the divorce and second marriage rubbed against Catholic moral teachings. Rather than complicate the image of a true Catholic convert, it seemed easier not to open this can of worms. After all, at the time of the writing of Credo, the German churches tried to curb what they perceived as the sexual licentiousness of the Nazi era and of the immediate postwar years. “In the early to mid-1950s,” Dagmar Herzog (2005) observes, “an abrupt shift toward far greater sexual conservatism” occurred in West Germany, spearheaded by the Protestant and Catholic churches, with “Christian spokespersons often present[ing] sexual propriety as the cure for the nation’s larger moral crisis” (pp. 101, 73). In such climate, Morgenschweis would have been ill-advised to shout from the rooftops improper sexual behavior of his spiritual client, especially since Pohl had no inclination to annul his marriage to Eleonore, which he had entered under the banner of Nazi Gottgläubigkeit rather than the tutelage of the church.

Given the complete textual absence of his wives and other intimate others, it is all the more astounding that one woman is repeatedly acknowledged: Pohl’s pious mother. Since no other family member and intimate other is inserted into the conversion narrative, why does she enjoy such privilege?

It is, for sure, a limited privilege his mother enjoys: She is never called by her name and is painted in a dreadfully monochromatic fashion. She is a “self-sacrificing mother,” who modeled for Pohl an “inner piety” (Credo, p. 17); she a “pious mother,” who installed a “religious fervor” in her young son (p. 21); she is a “simple but infinitely caring and pious mother,” who created a “paradise” in his childhood (p. 42). The maternal typology is plain to see: As mother, she is the guarantor of Pohl’s humanness, the paradise from which Pohl was expelled, and the seed (and model) of
piety to which he eventually returns. In her narrative function, she is modeled after Augustine’s mother Monica, who similarly represents a steady Christian piety. “From his earliest references [in the Confessions],” writes Kim Power (1996), “Monica is the ever present and significant figure who mediates the gifts of God to Augustine” (p. 77). As models for piety, these women are textually bereft of all sexuality. As biological mothers, they are half carnal, half archetypical (see Hawkins, 1990, p. 242). They are harbingers of the eventual arrival and triumph of the ultimate spiritual Mother—the church.

Augustine’s Confessions are the unacknowledged yet recognizable foil for Credo. For example, Credo’s first chapter is crudely modeled after the Confessions in at least three respects, and Pohl’s mother holds a symbolic key in it. First, during his travels with the German Navy, for the first time away from home (and mom), the young Pohl is exposed to the “restless and sinful hustle and bustle of the large Asian ports and trading centers luring with excitement” (Credo, p. 17). One recognizes here a reference to Augustine’s student years in the Roman-African port of Carthage, where “all around me hissed a cauldron of illicit loves” (3.1.1). Second, Pohl’s wavering between his dutiful Bible reading in his youth and the increasingly stronger pull of the Stoics, Voltaire, and Nietzsche emulates Augustine’s elaborate philosophical struggles between, on the one hand, his attraction to Neo-Platonism and Manichaeism and, on the other, the superior wisdom found in the Scriptures. Third, Augustine’s Monica and Pohl’s nameless mother are introduced as representations of a stable piety. They are a measuring rod by which the degree of their sons’ moral corruption and distance to God can be determined. At the end of the first chapter, Pohl has abandoned the Protestant piety of his mother and is about to go astray. Appropriately, Pohl concludes the chapter by declaring his existential sense of loss: “I was entirely caught in myself, in the shameful hopelessness of [thinking] that I can handle my inner battles myself” (Credo, 23). Similar sentiments of loss of self in contradistinction to maternal piety are expressed throughout Augustine’s Confessions: “What was my state of mind?” Augustine wonders early on. “It is quite certain that it was utterly shameful and a disgrace to me that I had it” (2.9.17). Later, Augustine writes: “I had departed from myself … [and] could not even find myself, much less you [God]” (5.2.2). And still later, when already in Milan: “I had no confidence and had lost hope that truth could be found … [Yet] my mother, strong in her devotion, had already come to join me” (6.1.1).

Whatever one can say about the parallelism of Credo and the Confessions, we should not forget that the former can never hold a candle to the latter. Credo only replicates opportune Augustinian themes, and Pohl as confessing perpetrator is never moved to explore himself in any comparable depth to Augustine’s soul searching. The same is true with respect to their mothers: To Pohl, she is no more than a trace, devoid of flesh and blood and personality. She is there to signify the virtues of piety and Bible reading. As such, she stands in contrast with the ills of modern secularism: the Stoics, Voltaire and Nietzsche.20

Without a life of her own, the portrayal of Pohl’s mother does not come close to the limited complexity of Augustine’s portrait of Monica. Of course, Monica is also an “idealized figure” (Brown, 1969, p. 164): she is “Augustine’s eternally unfinished business” (Burrus, 2004, p. 77) and is “redolent with the imagery … of Mary,” “based on the template of the ideal Roman mother” (Power, 1996, pp. 91,
71). Monica is never fully fleshed out, but late in his Confessions, Augustine returns to her portrait: After his own conversion and shortly before her death, he adds a few “rough edges of real life” to it (Paffenroth, 2003, pp. 145). No longer just an exemplary model, Monica is described as somewhat flawed and “deliberately sinful” (Paffenroth, 2003, p. 144). She is “subtly transformed into an ordinary human being,” as Peter Brown (1969) put it, “an object of concern, a sinner like himself, equally in need of mercy” (p. 164). In contrast, Pohl’s portrayal of his nameless mother remains entirely flat and monotone. What remains of her are a few empty and clichéd markers: pious, caring, simple. If Monica is already a trace, then Pohl’s mother is but a trace of a trace.

Neither mother, of course, will have the last word. Both are eventually replaced by a mother far greater than any real woman can embody. In the famous vision at Ostia, after Augustine’s conversion, he and Monica experience a moment of shared spiritual ecstasy. Their shared vision seems to indicate that mother and son are finally on equal footing: Augustine has ascended to the level of maternal piety, while Monica, whose steadfast faith had just been a little unhooked by Augustine’s telling, is exposed as sharing some of her son’s sinful weaknesses. It would be wrong, however, to assume a lasting equality between mother and son. The narrative placement of the Ostia vision suggests that their shared experience is less about a moment of spiritual “equal opportunity” and more about Augustine’s permanent displacement of his mother. Newly converted, Augustine no longer needs Monica’s maternal piety as measurement. “With her goal accomplished,” writes Power (1996), “she literally has no further purpose in life” (p. 89). As bishop of Hippo, he now speaks for the church. Monica, the biological mother, has been exchanged for a female ecclesia.21

Similarly, after Pohl’s conversion, his mother is no longer needed. Halfway through the text, she simply disappears. In the early parts of Credo, she embodies a sentimentalized memory of Protestant piety, who must be supplanted the instant her son returns to the bosom of the only true Catholic Church. In the economy of spiritual gift-giving, the Protestant, natural mother is exchanged for the Catholic ecclesia as spiritual mother.

Intriguingly, it is only after Pohl’s mother disappears in the text that a strongly gendered image of a male-male intimate exchange surfaces in Credo. The gentle and erotically suggestive male-male encounter occurs between Pohl and his prison chaplain. The text purged of his mother (and of other women), Pohl takes on a passive-receptive, feminized role vis-à-vis his relationship to a “forcefully” manly Morgenschweis:

I now opened my heart to the Catholic prison chaplain. Had the eloquently forceful man of God earlier loosened the dried soil of faith through his stirring sermons, he now planted his seeds of divine revelation into the seed-craving land. My whole being changed under his leadership ... [Like] a powerful torrent, the Good News, as taught by the only true Catholic Church, flooded me (Credo, p. 49).22

In the gendered imagery of this sexually charged passage, the chaplain as confessor spiritually inseminates the confessant’s starved but now lubricated soul. The
perpetrator finds himself on the receiving end of this male exchange, the one in need of spiritual impregnation. Pregnant with spirit, he himself “gives birth” to his conversion narrative. More importantly, though, Pohl is not just giving birth but, given his effeminized position, is the one given birth to: he is born again, and the church becomes his new mother, his spiritual mother. She ensures the homecoming of her prodigal son and nourished him at her bosom.

The metaphoric allusions and gender reversals do not yet end. Eleonore’s drawing, after all, renders the “the bosom of the church” as a male shepherd wearing the black habit of a priest. Pohl as (innocent, purified) lamb is cradled in the arms of Morgenschweis, his shepherd. In this male-male embrace, the perpetrator and his hagiographer have created a new family bond that gets by without women. Intuitively (and perhaps enviously), Pohl’s wife Eleonore has captured the sexual-spiritual dynamic of this encounter: it is closed to women. Women have no access to and no place within this world. Biological mothers are no longer needed, just as the presence of any woman would only disrupt the pastoral tranquility of this scene.

Religious Discourse as Remasculinization

The new church teachings were not accepted without some internal resistance on Pohl’s part. After all, to be measured by the standards of a new morality produces anxieties, and Pohl as former head of the WVHA (the Economics and Administrative Department of the SS) is not free of them. He writes:

My fate has taught me something else. The teachings were quite bitter, the methods of the gallows barbaric, but extremely curative. In the purgatory of this extreme dejection I was purified to receive the true faith in God ... The moment of transformation filled me with a longing love. It is love that matters above all (Credo, p. 57).

Pohl had been shaken up to some degree by reading his life through the lens of a newly acquired belief system. Certainly, we must assume that his transformation was credible to Morgenschweis, who, after a period of Christian instruction, administered the Eucharistic sacrament and welcomed him into the Catholic Church. Moments of spiritual sincerity must have transpired between Pohl and Morgenschweis to which the reader is not privy. Yet, Credo falls short of the demands that the genre of public confessional writing exerts on men. Though Credo emulates aspects of the Confessions, it never reaches Augustine’s literary and philosophical sophistication. It does not show Pohl to be a man willing to open his heart and soul without reservation. He does not render his sinful self naked to the public eye and, hence, to judgment. Instead, Credo’s apologetic discourse seeks to protect its male subject. It does not show Pohl to be a man willing to open his heart and soul without reservation. He does not render his sinful self naked to the public eye and, hence, to judgment. Instead, Credo’s apologetic discourse seeks to protect its male subject. In this sense, we can say that Credo is not an original adaptation of the confessional form in order to account for the extraordinary culpability of a genocidal perpetrator. Rather, it rehearses certain narrative conventions and inserts external markers of the confession tradition in order to persuade readers of the credibility of Pohl’s moral transformation.

On the one hand, the conversion story portrays Pohl as a man rendering himself passive, powerless and victimized. He must let go of his former martial masculinity to be nurtured and spiritually inseminated by his confessor. He is, so to
speak, temporarily “feminized.” In addition, other accused Nazis who shared the same prison routine with Pohl continued to view Christianity as a religion of weaklings, a belief system for unmanly characters. Not by accident does Credo report on Pohl’s anxiety over his Christian conversion. In the Preface, Morgenschweis writes that Pohl, as former head of the WVHA, was at risk for being ridiculed among his fellow inmates. Pohl might have feared that he had turned too soft. Yet, he must have also realized that this “softer” self allowed him to portray himself as an ordinary human being. Religious language, in this instance, helped to present a male perpetrator in need of care and compassion—an admission of emotional dependency, which was no small feat for men socialized and politicized in the Great War and its aftermath. It is precisely this turn to a feminized passivity—the self-pitying and self-victimization—that allowed Pohl to briefly expose his soul. Through tiny cracks in the manly façade of a (former) perpetrator, small concessions and incomplete confessions slipped through.

The temporary feminization of a male persona had advantages, especially in the early 1950s. The image of a “softer” male self—a suffering man receptive to a new morality—became a ticket for the possibility of clemency and social reintegration. Credo plays with these potentialities, even if, at the end, Pohl was not awarded another chance but hanged by the Allies.

On the other hand, religion is more than just a mechanism by which men like Pohl rendered themselves weak and vulnerable. Religion also empowered and re-masculinized them. Ultimately, Credo as a confessional narrative does not document a self-critical and self-interrogative soul-searching but an exchange of powers. The authoritative appeal of religious language makes possible not only the distancing from but also the supplanting of one’s old ideological loyalties. In Credo, this is explicitly expressed when Pohl pleads for himself that he, as “an old soldier,” can’t be blamed “for being highly impressed by the strong love of order and authoritative leadership of the Catholic Church” (Credo, p. 60). The dictatorial NS-ideology is replaced with ecclesiastical supremacy.

After the conversion, Pohl seeks to speak with a new moral authority and new respectability invested in him by Morgenschweis and the church. He feels newly empowered to criticize his accusers (the American Allies) as he, at the same time, wants to embody the virtues of humility and tranquility. Beyond the secular goal of social reintegration, religion provided the male self the possibility of renewing masculine morality. Pohl is truly reborn as a new man—this, at least, is what the gendered and religious rhetoric tries to convey.

Credo thus exemplifies a discourse specific to perpetrators who are trying to become witnesses to themselves by taking recourse to religious language. Religion helps them to make meaning of their lives within a context of changed power relations. The result is deeply apologetic. Their testimonies straddle a fine line between asserting (masculine) responsibility and (feminized) self-disempowerment. The perpetrators disempower themselves by denying agency for their own culpable actions in the past and by portraying themselves as victims in the present. The passivity and self-pitying that accompanies these presentations amounts to a certain self-feminization—if by “feminization” we understand not a representation of real women but a cultural code that stands in contrast to traditional views of masculinity, to which Pohl like other men from his generational cohort had subscribed before
their arrest. The fine line that is being walked in Pohl’s testimony is between holding on to one’s masculinity while allowing also a softer version of the male self to emerge.

This new masculine version, however, is largely a masquerade. The new man, who finds himself in a disempowered social situation after 1945, continues to cling to power by attempting to replace one ideological loyalty with another. Pohl fell from power as a Nazi leader but now, as a Christian convert, poses as a new man. Only through the textual fissures of his flawed confession do hints of his troubled masculinity break through.

Outside the Allied prison cells, German masculinity was in trouble as well. With the defeat of Germany, with four million German men dead and close to twelve million in POW camps, men generally had difficulties in the postwar period in readjusting and reintegrating into society—a conflict that lasted well into the 1950s (see Schissler 2001b). The lost war, the denazification program and the question of guilt were particularly called upon to explain the deflated sense of the German male, including physical impotence. One German physician wrote in 1947 that “the male gender [was] hit harder in its soul by the lost war than the female,” while a German psychologist reasoned that “the question of guilt” was deeply damaging to marriages (quoted in Herzog, 2005, p. 86f). Denazification was blamed “for the decline in high-quality manliness.” “Strong masculinity was in disrepute,” Herzog remarks, “both because of Nazism and because of its defeat” (p. 97; emphasis in original). In one word: the “straight male egos needed boosting” (p. 97).

This crisis must have been felt even more strongly among imprisoned Nazi perpetrators like Oswald Pohl. Certainly, the world had turned out to be dramatically different than they had envisioned it only a few years earlier. Their dream of a racially cleansed Lebensraum (living space) for a Greater Germany was reduced to the size of their prison cell (see Eleonore’s illustration for chapter 3). In this new world, the religious discourse provided by the postwar German churches began to play a comforting and supporting role. It negotiated the delicate act of maintaining one’s masculinity while rendering oneself selectively passive and effeminate.

Conclusion

With the Latin phrase Te Deum laudamus, the main narrative of Credo concludes. It is, of course, yet another deliberate reference to Augustine’s Confessions. But Credo is not a confession is the sense of the Augustinian master narrative. In order to accomplish the latter, one must hold on to—at least ideally and in principle—the ethical claim that a true confession requires a male self-making the best possible effort of rendering himself vulnerable to himself, to the public eye and, possibly, to God. Submission to judgment outside of the control of the confessing self is crucial. Relinquishing all control means to confess all grievous sins, which, in the case of genocidal perpetrators, translates into confessing culpability for all acts of abetting and committing atrocities. This, however, did not happen. Credo is a document that lacks any sustained effort of soul-baring.

Augustine writes in a commentary to the Gospel of John that “to testify (confiteri) [is] to speak out what the heart holds true. If the tongue and the heart are at odds, you are reciting, not testifying” (quoted in Wills, 1999, p. xvi). In Credo, tongue and heart are at odds, and hence Pohl’s confession, in light of Augustine’s
admonition, is merely a “reciting.” By and large, Pohl and Morgenschweis recite a litany of already practiced arguments that are part of an emerging postwar German discourse by and about perpetrators. They repeat these arguments, rehearse them, modulate them. What Credo adds to this chorus of apologetic voices is its deliberate adoption of the genre of the Christian confession. But precisely that which is most desperately needed from the confession of a genocidal perpetrator, namely the public recognition of his failed moral agency in the past, is almost entirely absent in Credo. Such an evasive discourse did not end with the execution of Oswald Pohl in Landsberg in 1951, but continued to characterize the legal and psychological defense of Nazi perpetrators for many decades to come.

References


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Notes
2 The other person working on this narrative from a somewhat different perspective is Katharina von Kellenbach. She introduces Pohl in her study with the working title The Mark of Cain. She develops a theological criticism of the efforts of postwar German church and theology to reintegrate Nazi perpetrators; it is a counter-reading of perpetrator documents and testimonies through the biblical narrative of Cain.
3 For a fine collection of various cultural aspects of this period in West Germany, see Schissler (2001a). For the German situation of the Catholic Church in the 1950s, see Gabriel (1993). For a socio-political perspective on the 1950s as a new epoch, see Schwarz (1989).
4 All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.
5 Unless otherwise noted, I am using Henry Chadwick’s (1992) translation of Augustine’s Confessions. I omit Chadwick’s text insertions of the biblical references. For the Latin text, see O’Donnell (1992, vol. 1).
6 In his Preface, Morgenschweis emphasizes that Pohl “has written the conversion story himself” (Credo, p. 9) and that he, on his own accord and without undue external influence, longed for converting to Catholicism: “Pohl came to his conversion solely under the influence of God’s grace” (p. 10). The chaplain needs to insist on Pohl’s independent decision-making and authorship in order to uphold the integrity of the conversion experience.
7 A detailed analysis of Credo as a collaborative product between Pohl and Morgenschweis and their common attempt to trivialize Pohl’s guilt is forthcoming in a separate piece, “A Perpetrator and his Hagiographer: The Case of Oswald Pohl’s Confession.”
“Haltung” is a term rich with meaning, which pre-1945 generational cohorts embraced as a positive virtue; see Autsch (2000). It simultaneously refers to an inner attitude, one’s overall attitude toward life/general view of life, and one’s physical posture. It is the embodied expression of a person’s moral, political, social and religious interior. Haltung implies a principled attitude that moves a person beyond individual gratification to the point of self-sacrificial duty. Often, it carries a certain emotional coldness and is employed to describe or self-describe conservative men. Pohl uses the term several times in Credo, mostly to describe his straight and righteous attitude in face of the desperate situation he faces in prison (pp. 39, 40, 46).

Like the English “intercourse,” the German word Verkehr (which also means “traffic”) can refer to social exchange/company as well as to sexual intercourse. Morgenschweis clearly uses it in the former sense, and I do not intend to insinuate any sexual impropriety.

For a short summary on the trials and German efforts of political amnesty and clemency, see Von Kellenbach (2001, p. 47f). For Pohl, see Schulte (2001, p. 432). For the Catholic Church, see Phayer (2000, esp. pp. 138-144). For detailed historical studies on the social, legal and political dimensions, see Buscher (1989, pp. 91-130), Frei (1999, pp. 133-233) and Schwartz (1990). During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the most important spokespeople for clemency were, in the Protestant churches, Hans Meiser (Munich), Theophil Wurm (Stuttgart), Otto Dibelius (Berlin) and even Martin Niemöller; among Catholics, it was Cardinal Frings and auxiliary bishop Johannes Neuhausler.

According to Posset, Morgenschweis continued his defensive attitude on behalf of accused Nazis long after 1951 in various lectures, articles and letters to newspapers. Unfortunately, Posset does not properly identify his sources.

German Catholics participated vigorously in the anti-modernism battles of Catholicism during the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth century. For role of the Protestant churches in postwar Germany, see Hockenos (2004) and Greschat (1990); for Catholicism, see Löhr (1990) and Gabriel (1993). See also Herzog (2005, pp. 103-107).

The German word for conversion is unambiguously Bekehrung. The term Bekenntnis, however, carries both the meaning of “confession” (confession of sin) and “profession” (declaration of faith). In the German original, the repeated usage of Bekenntnis, hence, leaves no doubt from the very start that Credo must be read in light of a Christian confession story.

Pohl received the Papal blessing by telegram in March of 1951. The Vatican later explained that it did not know that Pohl was a Nazi criminal at Landsberg and that the benediction was given simply in response to a request for a member of the church who was dying. I am thankful to Katharina von Kellenbach for providing this information. She tracked down an English translation of an article on this issue (Münchner Merkur, March 28, 1951) at the National Archives in Silver Spring, Md. (RG 549 USAEUR, Records of War Criminal Prison No. 1 at Landsberg, Records Related to Executed Prisoners, Jan 2, 1946-June 7, 1951).

Chapter 1 opens with a memory in the summer of 1913, when the 21-year-old Pohl landed with the German Navy on a small island in the Pacific Ocean. There he
came across military graves of German sailors who had lost their lives during an indigenous uprising.

16 Pohl’s 1936 departure was part of the wave of Kirchenaustritte (leaving the churches) following Heydrich’s and Himmler’s examples. Steigmann-Gall (2003) summarizes the situation in 1936: “There was no directive from the party leadership ordering Kirchenaustritt; the evidence suggests that it arose as a spontaneous movement within the NSDAP ... In 1936 there came a flood, however, beginning with Himmler and Heydrich leaving the Catholic Church early that year” (p. 219). Pohl’s account echoes the historian’s observation: “Members of the SS were never ordered to leave the church. I am not familiar with any such order by Himmler” (Credo, p. 29). See also Nanko (1993).

17 Karl Adam’s work Das Wesen des Katholizismus (1924) is most often quoted in Credo, sometimes in long passages. It was Adam’s most popular book, reprinted thirteen times until 1957. On Adam’s Nazi complicity, see Scherzberg (2001). Other theologians occasionally quoted in Credo are Romano Guardini, the Swedish bishop Söderblom, the Protestant Heiler and Augustine, as well as biblical verses and, briefly, Goethe and Kant.

18 The citation is from the opening of the Confessions (1.1.1).


20 Pohl (Credo, p. 21) also mentions briefly his disenchantment with the gospels after reading Ernest Renan’s, Das Leben Jesu (1863). Renan’s book created a sensation in the late 19th century, presenting the gospels as legend rather than historical accounts (see Heschel, 1998, pp. 154-158).

21 According to Power (1996), the church “for Augustine is overwhelmingly maternal. Like Monica her yearning is ever for her erring children and, like Monica, she seeks them patiently but inexorably ... motivated by the desire to convert the prodigal” (p. 92).

22 In German: “Da öffnete ich mein Herz dem katholischen Gefängnispfarrer. Hatte dieser wortgewaltige Gottesmann bis dahin durch seine aufrüttelnden Predigten den verkrusteten Glaubensboden gelockert, so säte er nun den Samen göttlicher Offenbarung in das saatgierige Land ... [I]n gewaltigem Strom überflutete mich die Frohe Botschaft, wie sie die alleinseligmachende katholische Kirche lehrt.”

23 For example, Karl Brandt, fellow prisoner at Landsberg and sentenced to death for his leading role in the euthanasia program, proudly maintained his anti-Christian, pagan world view until the very end. He accused Christians of hypocrisy and lying and wrote shortly before his execution that “only the pagan dies joyfully” (letter from April 6, 1047, reprinted in Deutsche Hochschullehrer Zeitung, 10/1, 1962). Brandt was hanged in 1948.

24 Pohl belonged to the political cohort of the so-called 1918ers. These men were defined by their war enthusiasm at the beginning of 1914 and their subsequent disillusionment and anger with the German defeat in 1918. For the mentality of the 1918ers, see Krondorfer (2006, pp. 46-49).

25 For George Mosse (1996), “respectability” is a crucial aspect in the construction of modern masculinity, while masculinity, in turn, is closely linked to “modern national consciousness.” “Respectability ... provides society with essential cohesion” (p. 192f).
To portray Pohl as a respectable new citizen, then, is an attempt of a new nation-building.

Lebensraum was one of the key concepts of Nazi ideology, arguing that Germany rightfully deserved more living space, especially in the East.

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Narratives of Silence: Availability in a Spirituality of Fathering

Neil Pembroke

The author takes a narrative approach to the spirituality of paternal availability. In all of the stories that are investigated, the theme of silence is prominent. Silence manifests itself through the modalities of restraint, loving action, and listening. These three modalities express quite comprehensively the Marcelian concept of personal availability. Marcel relates availability to both receptivity and belonging. Further, he identifies Christ as the ground of these commitments. Using these concepts, a Christian perspective on the spirituality of fatherhood is developed.

The research that social scientists have carried out on fatherhood over the past thirty or more years has indicated a small but significant increase in paternal participation in the care and nurture of children. While this constitutes a positive development in fatherhood, it is important to recognize that there is a deeper level of paternal relationality than basic care for the needs of the child. “Caring for” a child is not necessarily the same as “caring about” her (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001, p. 392). When a father cares deeply about his children, there is a spiritual dimension in his relationship with them. The spirituality of fatherhood, I contend, is grounded in a father’s capacity for a loving disposal of himself for the sake of his children. It is this disposability or availability that I am interested in here. In my view, the best treatment of the meaning of personal availability is provided by the French philosopher and Catholic Christian, Gabriel Marcel. In Marcel’s (1964) approach, availability means both openness to the other and forming a covenant of belonging with her. This covenant of belonging, he contends, is ultimately grounded in the love of Christ. The aim of this paper is to explore the way in which fathers express their love for their children through these spiritual dynamics.

The method used in this attempt to gain an understanding of the spirituality of paternal availability is a narrative one. Psychologists, theologians, and moral philosophers who use this method are impressed by the fact that human persons think, feel, act, and exercise their moral imagination according to narrative structures. Story, they note, is highly significant in the human quest for meaning and self-understanding.

In carrying out a search for stories of fathers’ caring relationships with their children, I was initially struck by the way in which Sarbin (2002) identified silence as a prominent theme in the narratives that are recorded in the book, Between Fathers and Sons. As I continued my search, I found myself drawn to this motif. Paternal
silence was most often presented in a negative light. There were a number of references in adult children’s reports to suffering the “silence of absence,” to receiving “the silent treatment” when father disapproved, and to the inability to communicate affection. Given that paternal parenting failures are a common topic both in the popular media and in academic publications, these are the kinds of reports that one might expect to find. What I was less prepared for was the finding that paternal silence was also reported in a positive light. Specifically, it was associated with paternal love and self-communication. It is this dimension of paternal silence that is pursued here. I have taken an account by a father and some stories from adult children (including one drawn from my personal experience) to present a portrait of the spirituality of paternal availability through silence. The way in which silence functions in these personal reports I have sought to capture through the following three modalities: restraint, self-giving, and listening. I discovered, first, that some fathers are wise enough to silence their inclination to dominate their children’s learning. They know the value of restraint. Keeping quiet on occasion creates a space for the child to develop her natural sense of wonder. Through my research, second, I was also reminded that for children loving actions have a moral presence that is stronger than words. Paternal love is often powerfully expressed through a (largely) non-verbal self-communication. And finally, reflection on the experience of my own father’s love brought to mind a story illustrative of his capacity to silence his intentions in order to attend to me. Dad was, and is, a good listener. He has the capacity to quickly still his own mental traffic in order to be fully present to others.

I have just indicated that the category of story is central in this attempt to grasp the “soul of fatherhood” (Garbarino, 2000). It is well to begin with a brief description of the narrative approach to understanding human thought and action.

Narrative and Life

One of the significant recent developments in the intellectual view of human life and the world has been the turn to narrative. Quite a large number of social scientists, psychotherapists, philosophers, educators, political scientists, ethicists, and theologians have identified story as a fundamental category in their work (Cf. Kreiswirth, 2000). That life has a storied nature can easily be seen when one observes, first, that we all live out narratives in our daily activities, and, second, that we use narrative to help us understand what those activities mean (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 197). With this in mind, Sarbin (1986) proposes a “narrative principle.” This principle is used to capture the fact “that human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (Sarbin, 1986, p. 8).

While virtually everyone accepts that human beings use narrative as a way of imposing structure on human experience, some object that the category is assigned a more significant role in interpreting human thought and action than is warranted. They argue that a fundamental difference between what goes on in a literary work and in real life is that in the former case the author has complete control over the story and can therefore generate structure and order (see Crossley, 2000, p. 52). Life is not nearly as neat and orderly as a literary work. Chaos and contingency define the lives we lead. The fact that there is inevitably a “messiness” associated with our lives does not, however, rule out a narrative approach to human existence. This is so
because, like the author of a literary work, we are selective in the way that we approach our lives. That is to say, we are quite discriminating in the way we plot our lives (Crossley, 2000, p. 53). Certain options are set aside because they do not fit with the way we understand the story of our lives. That is, to some extent we direct the action in our personal narratives. It is also the case that we are selective in the way we tell and retell the central narratives in our experience of the world. In this way, we bring coherence and continuity to the chaos of our live reality. As we communicate to others (and to ourselves) who we are, there is an ordering of personal experience through a narrative process that has the function of producing meaning and a sense of identity (Sarbin, 2002). The self comes into being through story-telling. We know who we are and what our lives mean because of the stories we tell about ourselves.

In what follows, the focus is on stories that teach us important truths about the spirituality of a father’s relationship with his children. Social scientific research is telling us that paternal involvement has been on the increase for some time now. In order to set the scene for the narrative study of paternal availability, we will turn to a brief survey of this research.

The Involvement of Fathers in Parenting

Traditionally, fathers have been depicted as relatively uninvolved in the care of children. Their primary roles in this presentation are breadwinner and role model (Atkinson & Blackwelder, 1993; LaRossa, 1997; Palkovitz, 1996). Fathers exist to provide, first, material and moral support for their wives, and, second, a model of responsibility, commitment, and hard work for their children. But many claim that we are now witnessing a revolution in fatherhood. This is the era of the “new father.” According to the new ideology, fathers should not only provide materially for their families, they should also be actively involved both physically and emotionally in the nurture of their children. The distant father of the traditional family is fading away as more and more dads are experiencing a change of heart. “[T]he hearts of men—and the face of parenting—are changing before our eyes. This is about fathers crying, cooking, being afraid, braiding hair, waiting with the children at the doctor’s office, the principal’s office, after school at the soccer field” (Gillenkirk, 2000, p. 20).

While there is no doubt that a significant change is in the air, talk of a revolution is probably exaggerated. It is more a case of a gradual evolution toward a new understanding of fatherhood (Parke, 1996, p. 3). Though it is true that fathers are now more involved in parenting, there is still a long way to go. There is clearly a gap between the rhetoric of the involved father and what fathers are actually doing (LaRossa, 1997, p. 5). Despite a certifiable increase in paternal participation (LaRossa, 1997; Parke, 1996; Wilcox, 2004), mothers continue to take most of the load in the care of children.

Whether it is revolution or evolution that we are talking about, social scientists have shown a high degree of interest in researching the involved father. Lamb (2000) identifies three dimensions in paternal involvement in the care of children, namely engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. Engagement refers to the time spent in one-to-one interaction through activities such as feeding the child, helping her with homework, and playing games with her. The term accessibility is
used to denote availability to the child rather than direct interaction. A father may be reading his newspaper, for example, while the child plays a short distance away. Responsibility, finally, is indicative of the extent to which the father acts as “primary manager” in the child’s day-to-day affairs. The common needs of a child include medical care, childcare and baby-sitting, clothing, and care and support when ill. Responsibility is a measure of the level of the father’s involvement in taking care of the arrangements associated with these, and other, needs.

While this increase in father involvement constitutes a very welcome development, it is important to recognize that there is a deeper level of paternal relationality than basic care for the needs of the child. As indicated above, “caring for” a child is not necessarily the same as “caring about” her. When a father cares deeply about his children, there is a spiritual dimension in his relationship with them. The spirituality of fatherhood is grounded in a father’s capacity for a loving disposal of himself for the sake of his children. Marcel (1950, 1964) refers to this loving disposal of self as availability. We turn now to a consideration of his insightful work.

**Marcelian Availability: Basic Theory and Theological Reflections**

To describe a willingness to make the self available, Gabriel Marcel uses the word, *disponibilité*. It has a financial connotation and is linked to the notion of disposable assets. The available person is the one who is prepared to put all of her assets at the disposal of the other.

Marcel (1964) also interprets *disponibilité* in terms of receptivity. He develops the link between the two terms in an essay in Creative Fidelity entitled “Phenomenological Notes on Being in a Situation.” To exist with others, he observes, is to be exposed to influences. It is not possible to be human without to some extent being permeable to those influences. Permeability, in its broadest sense, is associated with a certain lack of cohesion or density. Thus, the fact of being exposed to external influences is linked with a kind of *in-cohesion*. I am “porous,” open to a reality that seeks to communicate with me. Marcel puts it this way:

I must somehow make room for the other in myself; if I am completely absorbed in myself, concentrated on my sensations, feelings, anxieties, it will obviously be impossible for me to receive, to incorporate in myself, the message of the other. What I called incohesion a moment ago here assumes the form of disposability. (Marcel, 1964, p. 88)

Disposability, then, is closely associated with receptivity. Receptivity involves a readiness to make available one’s personal center, one’s ownmost domain. We receive others in a room, in a house, or in a garden, but not on unknown ground or in the woods. Receptivity means that I invite the other *chez soi* (Marcel, 1950, p. 118). That is, I invite him to “be at home” with me. A home receives the imprint of one’s personality; something of myself is infused into the way my home-space is constructed. Contrast this with “the nameless sadness” associated with a hotel room; this is no-one’s home. To share one’s home-space is disposability or availability because “[t]o provide hospitality is truly to communicate something of oneself to the other” (Marcel, 1950, p. 91).
Over against this generosity of spirit sits a tendency to become absorbed in self. The only way to break out of self obsession, according to Marcel (1964), is by “submerging oneself suddenly in the life of another person and being forced to see things through his eyes” (p. 51). One cannot break out of this “inner inertia” on one’s own; it is through the presence of another person that this “miracle” is accomplished. The miracle does not, of course, happen automatically; one must be open, responsive, to the appeal of the other.

We are, however, still left with the questions: Why am I non-responsive to the suffering of the other? Why do I feel opaque, non-permeable? Marcel believes that non-availability is associated with the tendency to see one’s existence in terms of possession. I will treat myself as indisposible “just so far as I construe my life or being as a having which is somehow quantifiable, hence as something capable of being wasted, exhausted or dissipated” (Marcel, 1964, p. 54). In this attitude, I become like a person who knows that his small sum of money must last a very long time. I become afflicted with an anxiety and a concern that discourage self-giving. These negative affects are “reabsorbed into a state of inner inertia” (Marcel, 1964, p. 54).

But if we feel we really belong to another person, we do not count the cost of, or keep a score on, our self-communication. Marcel broadened his analysis of availability to include the idea of belonging. We seem to be on dangerous ground in speaking about belonging to another person. It seems as if I must disenfranchise myself in giving myself away. Do I not in this act give up my personal autonomy? Marcel (1964) is acutely aware of the pit-falls associated with conceiving of disposability in terms of belonging. He begins his analysis with the case of servanthood. If I assert, he says, of a servant “he belongs to me,” I treat him as a thing acquired, as something to be disposed of as I wish. Everything changes, though, if I declare to another person, “I belong to you.” “Jack, I belong to you,” means “I am opening an unlimited credit account in your name, you can do what you want with me, I give myself to you” (Marcel, 1964, p. 40).

The fact that I give myself to you does not mean that I am your slave. I establish my freedom in the very act of freely giving myself to you. “[T]he best use I can make of my freedom is to place it in your hands; it is as though I freely substituted your freedom for my own; or paradoxically, it is by that very substitution that I realize my freedom” (Marcel, 1964, p. 40). (Here I am reminded of Jesus’ teaching on gain through loss: In losing oneself for Christ one gains fullness of life. See, for example, Mk 8:35; Mk 9:35; Jn 12:24.)

Though Marcel can assert that to give oneself freely to the other is to be free indeed, he feels the need to establish how it is possible that one can substitute the freedom of another for one’s own without a disenfranchisement. In order to give of oneself freely, one must have some authority over the self that is given. That is to say, if I am to dispose of myself I must belong to myself. Belonging to myself means that I am responsible for myself. When one begins to think this way, it is possible to construct a relational triad in which mutual availability and personal autonomy can co-exist. The components in this triad are these: I belong to you; you belong to me; I belong to myself (Marcel, 1964, p. 42).

Though for the most part Marcel prefers to operate at the threshold of faith rather than engage directly with the Christian heritage, he does make some explicit
theological statements in relation to availability. It is interesting that the leading British theologian, Alistair McFadyen, develops a very similar approach to Marcel (McFadyen, 1990, ch. 5). Crucial to the formation of personhood is what McFadyen calls “being centered.” The centering of one’s experience in the self is what constitutes autonomy. Being centered is defined as the “achievement of organizing one’s life from an organizational locus within oneself; the ability to refer the features of the world to oneself and one’s own location, so that the possibilities for action may be focused on as they relate to oneself and so be self-ascribed” (McFadyen, 1990, p. 312). I refer my experience of the world to my personal center and thereby ensure that my actions are self-ascribed. This is another way of stating Marcel’s idea that “I belong to myself.” The normative pattern for dialogue, in McFadyen’s schema, is built on the understanding that “we are properly centered as persons only by being directed towards the true reality of other personal centers: we become truly ourselves when we are truly for others” (McFadyen, 1990, p. 151). In Marcel’s language, I avoid the self-constricting egoism potentially associated with the “I belong to myself” when I simultaneously assert that “I belong to you” and “You belong to me.”

McFadyen points to the fact that in a Christian understanding, mutual giving in a relationship is grounded in the presence and power of Christ. It is faith in Christ and the grace of his sustaining love which allows Christians to risk themselves with others:

The otherness of other people, including their brokenness, does not pose a threat of disintegration for those who live in the knowledge that they are upheld as integral beings in the presence of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and in the love and acceptance of God and/or others: who are, in other words, empowered by the Spirit, conformed to Christ and called into responsibility before God and others. (McFadyen, 1990, p. 157)

Marcel (1964) also claims that belonging to others is grounded in a belonging to Christ. He acknowledges that there may be an initial revolt against Christ’s claim that I belong to him. It seems as if Christ is exerting a tyranny over me. But, says Marcel, what frees this claim from any possibility of tyranny is the fact that, in a sense, Christ is not really someone else but “more internal to me than myself” (p. 100). His right is exercised not in terms of power but of love. If I can but overcome my unproductive resistance to what seems a tyrannical claim, says Marcel, I am set free from the strangulating grip of egoism.

I belong to myself; I belong to Christ; I belong to you; you belong to me. With these statements, Marcel (1964) seeks to offer an understanding of availability which holds together personal autonomy and freedom, on the one hand, and a genuine commitment to others that is grounded in Christ, on the other hand. Christ is the ground of the free act in which two persons in a loving relationship engage in a reciprocal substitution of freedom. Or to put it another way, in Christ the persons in relationship cease to belong to themselves as they transcend one another in the very heart of their love (Marcel, 1964, p. 99).

The stories of paternal availability that are offered below express both elements—openness and belonging—in disponibilité. We will reflect on the
experiences of fathers who open themselves fully to their children. They show a
certain “porousness” to the important experiences in their children’s lives. All of the
stories, secondly, speak to the experience of fathers expressing their deep sense of
belonging to their children. They show us a paternal love grounded in the unspoken
message, “I belong to you; I have opened an unlimited credit account on your behalf.”

The moral presence that is represented in these stories is not an explicitly
Christian one. That is, none of the agents refer to faith in Christ as an inspiration.
Nevertheless, Marcel would insist that in each of the acts of love that are referred to,
Christ is present. For him, the disposal of oneself for the other is an expression of
one’s true nature. And to express one’s true self is to express the grace of Christ. This
is what Marcel means when he says that Christ is “more internal to me than myself.”

In the stories that are presented below, we will encounter fathers who
express their bond of love with their children in quite beautiful ways. Like all of us
who have the deep privilege and responsibility of being a father, they are not
perfect. And yet, their intention is always to give of themselves for their children.
What I find interesting in the stories of paternal availability that are offered is that
they all involve the theme of silence.

Silence as Expressive of Paternal Availability

Silence is most often viewed negatively in relation to the availability of a father. We
are all too aware, for instance, of the “silent treatment” that has such a potential for
emotional wounding. When a child has erred in some way, a father may react by
creating an emotional distance that serves to communicate his deep disapproval. In
writing about this tendency in his father, Kenneth Gergen reflects that “[i]t was not
an instructive disapproval, the kind that points to promising routes toward
improvement; nor did it seem a charitable disapproval, the kind that otherwise
suggests understanding and sympathy for the errant action. Rather, those silences
seemed to bespeak a disgust; the depths of which I could not fathom” (Gergen,

Another common form of wounding paternal silence is absence. In looking
back on their childhood, many people will comment on the fact that their fathers
simply were not there. Work, other responsibilities, and personal passions were
always calling them away. When this “silence in absence” (Gergen et al, 2002, p.
134) is compounded by failure to be fully present when actually at home the effect is
quite devastating. Peter Garrett gives eloquent expression to the profound sense of
loss associated with this experience when he writes:

The aching fact is that because my father wasn’t often at home—or when he
was, he was unhappy and didn’t talk easily to his sons—I didn’t really get to
know this person who in part made me. There are real gaps in this half-
formed relationship that can’t be filled by photo albums and memories of
maiden aunts. (Garrett, 1997, p. 252)

Paternal silence can be particularly toxic. What I want to explore here, however, is
the way in which some paternal practices grounded in silence have just the opposite
effect. Fathers can, and do, express their personal availability to their children
through silence. There are three practices that I want to concentrate on: restraint, loving action, and listening.

Restraint

Loving fathers—and mothers—want the best for their children. They see the potential in their daughters and sons and want to do everything that they can to aid them in developing it. An important question that needs to be faced here is this: Along which particular line will the potential be developed? That is, will the child be given a certain amount of freedom in order to find her own way, or will the father succumb to the temptation to push her along the route that he has meticulously mapped for her? I use the phrase “a certain amount of freedom” advisedly. In an age when children are bombarded with unwholesome input from peers, the mass media, and the Internet, parents should not abdicate their responsibility for guiding and training their children. A laissez-faire approach to parenting is unhelpful and irresponsible.

Nevertheless, children do need space to be. Fathers express their commitment to their children through a loving restraint. They restrain their tendency to mold them into their own image. In holding back, they create a space that Nouwen (1975, p. 51)—referring to interpersonal relationships in general—calls a “friendly emptiness.” This is not a fearful emptiness, but rather an exciting one that provides room for the child to move. She is given the opportunity to explore herself and her potential. This exploration should be open, but not unbounded. There is a very big difference between pulling back and withdrawing altogether.

Pulling back is difficult for some. A father feels that he has so much to teach, so much wisdom to pass on. Words, sentences, and paragraphs tumble out of his mouth until all the holes in the learning space are filled. But it is the father that has done most of the filling. It may be that this is of relatively little concern to him. From his point of view, the important fact is that his child is learning and developing. She needed to be equipped to make her way in the world, and the requisite tools have been supplied.

There is a deeper paternal wisdom, however. There are those fathers who appreciate the value of silence. There is time to teach and a time to be quiet. Bruce Dawe is a teacher and a poet. He recalls that

[w]hen our first child, Brian, was trying out his first words for size, I had to keep on reminding myself that the parent who is a teacher (by profession that is, since all parents, like it or not, are teachers of one kind or another) must be ready to apply the brakes to his/her enthusiasm for correction of the younger generation. The young do have to learn many language lessons on their own. (Dawe, 1997, p. 275)

He captured this central paternal learning experience in a poem:

I have to be careful with my boy.  
When he says tree it comes out hazy 
very green and friendly and before I’ve got 
the meaning straight he’s up there laughing in it,
or working on the word for aeroplane
which is also a little above his head
so that he has to stand on tiptoe to touch it
--for him it does Immelmanns to order,
but when I try it becomes suddenly
only a model in a museum with props that slowly turn
when the button is pushed and a cutaway section
to show the engine in action...

I have to be careful with my boy,
that I don’t crumple his immediate-delivery-genuine-fold-up-and-extensible
world
into correct English forever, petrify its wonder
with the stony gaze of grammar, or turn him into
a sort of Sunday visitor at the lakeside
who brings bags of specially-prepared bread-crusts
to feed to swans who arch their necks and hiss. (Dawe, 1997, pp. 275-276)

Dawe’s metaphor of the petrification of wonder is especially instructive. A surplus of
paternal teaching has the effect of filling the learning space. When this happens,
there are no longer any openings for the child’s inquisitive drive to push through.
What began as wonder is metamorphosed through paternal over-involvement into a
solid block of dead imagination.

Fathers want the best for their children. Most have accumulated a
considerable amount of learning, wisdom, and experience. In their love for their
children, they seek to make this available to them. Fathers do need to be teachers,
but what Bruce Dawe’s experience reminds us is that there is also a very important
place for the “silence of restraint.” Giving of self for one’s child sometimes requires
holding back one’s teaching.

Loving Action
Children want to hear that their fathers—and mothers—love them, but even more
important to them are concrete demonstrations of love. While they can tolerate a
certain level of slippage between word and deed, once it extends beyond a certain
limit the language of love becomes tarnished. Actions are imbued with a higher
degree of moral power than words simply because when it comes to parenting it is
much easier to say it than it is to do it. Love is a form of work (Peck, 1990). Work is
defined as an activity involving the expenditure of energy in order to achieve a
defined goal. It requires physical, mental, and emotional energy to love a child. The
fact that many of us who are parents have a tendency to laziness means that we are
not always ready to expend the energy required to enact the commitment to our
children that we have professed. If these failures become too frequent, the words of
love that we utter begin to sound hollow to our children.

In reflecting on his relationship with his father, Donald Spence comments
that “words of any kind always came second to actions; not only did these speak
louder but they contained more of a moral presence. Language was cheap and often
untrustworthy” (Spence, 2002, p. 58). What is most prominent in Spence’s memory
of his father’s (he always called him by his first name, Ralph) mode of parenting is its selflessness. He tells this story:

I was sick in bed, my mother was in the hospital, and Ralph was planning to go out for the evening and play bridge with some friends. I pleaded with him not to leave and, with almost no hesitation, he offered to invite the bridge group to our house. He didn’t surround the offer with “maybes” or other conditionals; he simply said, “I’ll invite them here” and that was that. I was overjoyed; not only would he not leave me, but I could go to sleep to the sound of laughter and merriment. Looking back on this moment, I can see the same kind of selflessness at work: you do it but you don’t talk about it. Not only did he leave out the “maybes”; he also made no attempt to bargain with me or make a moral point. By doing and not saying, he showed me that actions can often speak much louder than words. (Spence, 2002, pp. 54-55)

Some readers may wonder at Spence’s reference to his father’s selflessness. Surely Ralph only did what any father with an ounce of decency would do. Be that as it may, this simple act of consideration had a lasting effect on Spence. He has treasured the memory all these years. It is both encouraging and humbling for those of us who are fathers to be reminded that even our small acts of kindness may be deeply valued by our children.

Our theme is silence, but words, it goes without saying, can be very powerful. They have the power to bind two people together. A secret shared, for example, creates a very strong bond. When intimate thoughts and feelings are shared and received with love and respect a deep sense of connection is established. It is also true that the bond of love can be firmly established without a word being spoken. In this story of a father trying to retrieve the “one that got away,” the theme of selflessness is again in evidence. Mark Tappan recalls proudly pulling a trout out of the water.

But as my dad was trying to get the hook out of its mouth the fish got loose and fell, flopping, onto the bank. In a flash my dad reached for the fish and tried to get a hold of it again, but it flopped quickly into the shallow water. Without a pause my dad jumped into the water to catch it—clothes, shoes, and all!!—but the fish was quicker, and it was gone.

I was stunned. I was a little sad about losing the fish, but mostly I couldn’t believe that my dad had just jumped into the water to try to catch that fish! My dad looked quite funny, flailing around in the water, and I know he felt bad about losing my fish. I don’t remember being embarrassed; I just remember being amazed at what my dad had done, that he would do something like that for me—jumping into the water, getting his clothes wet, showing no concern for himself, only for me. (Tappan, 2002, p. 94)

In these ordinary actions fathers display their readiness to dispose of themselves for their children. The father-child bond of belonging is established through the offer and the reception of the gift of self. It is not what is said here that is significant, but
rather what is done. The paternal commitment is enacted in the silence above and beyond proclamations of love.

**Listening**

High on the list of what children want from their fathers is to be acknowledged and validated through being seen, heard, and attended to. Osherson (1996) refers to the importance of a father becoming an attentive audience for his child. When the performance is being enacted an audience is a silent gathering. The onlookers find themselves fully engaged with what is going on up on the stage. They are receptive and ready for the experience that is offered to them. Or at least this is the case when the performance is both of a high quality and according to personal taste. When these conditions are not in place, the members of the audience may become restless and distracted. What makes listening attentively to a child challenging is the fact that often the “performance” is not especially riveting. If a father is to make himself available he needs to engage his powers of concentration. Nouwen (1972) takes this further when he says that good listening involves concentration without intention. Intentions refer to the random thoughts, pressing concerns, and pleasant musings that tear the listener away from his or her conversation partner. The silence required for good listening goes deeper than simply stopping oneself from interrupting. If a father is to attend to his child he needs to silence the intentions that are so distracting. This deeper silence is rooted in a spirituality of personal centering. “Anyone who wants to pay attention without intention has to be at home in his own house—that is, he has to discover the center of his life in his own heart” (Nouwen, 1972, p. 92).

The fact that my own father was such a good listener was enormously important to me. One memory that comes to mind just now is the times that he patiently listened to my explanations of how I managed to solve a particularly challenging calculus problem. In High School I really loved math and science. In fact, I was so enamored with these disciplines that I went on to study engineering at University. I would often be up late working on the calculus problems that we had been assigned in the first year of the course. If the problem was especially tough, when I finally found the solution I would be bursting with pleasure and pride. The elegance of the solution was a beautiful thing and I just had to have an audience to share my delight. My poor old Dad, very much engaged with his favorite TV program and not the slightest bit interested in calculus, was always the target. I remember very clearly his earnest attempts to follow each step. Of course he would usually get lost at some point. But that fact mattered little to me. What I really cared about was that he concentrated so hard. He knew how important this was to me, and he did his level best to attend closely to what I was telling him. Part of me knew that I was being silly burdening him with calculus problems that were of no interest to him. And yet I needed to share this important part of my life with him. That he listened so carefully and did his best to share in my excitement was enormously significant in the context of our relationship.

My father’s attentiveness expresses very well what is meant by the Marcelian concept of availability. Availability requires a certain “incohesion.” Spaces need to be created within the self into which the communications of the other can flow. It is exceedingly easy, as we all know only too well, to fill those spaces with one’s own
musings and concerns. The attentive father is the one who empties himself in the presence of his children. This emptiness is produced through creating a stillpoint in one’s personal center. When this is achieved, a father enters the silence that is the condition of the possibility of personal availability.

Conclusion

We have taken a narrative approach to the spirituality of paternal availability. In all of the stories we have investigated, the theme of silence has been prominent. We saw it expressed through the modalities of restraint, self-giving, and listening. Some fathers are wise enough, first, to silence their inclination to dominate their children’s learning. They know the value of restraint. Maintaining silence on occasion creates a space for the child to develop her natural sense of wonder. Through the fatherhood stories, second, we were reminded that for children loving actions have a moral presence that is stronger than words. And finally, we reflected on the importance in fatherhood of patient listening. This requires a capacity to silence one’s intentions in order to attend fully to one’s child.

These three modalities express quite comprehensively what Marcel means by personal availability. We saw that Marcel talks about availability in terms both of receptivity and belonging. Further, he considers that in these experiences of love and care, Christ is present. For Marcel, the disposal of oneself for the other is an expression of one’s true nature. And to express one’s true self is to express the grace of Christ.

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Men, Loss and Spiritual Emergency: Shakespeare, the Death of Hamnet and the Making of *Hamlet*

Peter Bray

*How does a father manage the death of his son or his father? What might a playwright do? This article proposes that confronted with the multiple loss of his son Hamnet and subsequently his father John, William Shakespeare experienced a transformational consciousness event or “spiritual problem” (DSM IV), defined by Grof and Grof as a “spiritual emergency” (SE), which he explores through the making of his masterpiece *Hamlet*. The play’s central male character is a fine example of an instrumental masculine response to coping with loss. It is argued that the depiction of Hamlet’s struggle towards self knowledge can be explained in terms of Stan Grof’s model of transformation. In his play Shakespeare expresses a unique view of complicated masculine grief and loss. Through Hamlet’s soliloquies he explores and maps the terrifying terrain and rich interior world of his own psychic journey and transformation.*

Men may consider the possibility of death and of all forms of loss in the course of a lifetime. Grof and Grof (1990) have suggested that confrontation with the issue of death is a pivotal part of the self-actualizing process and “an integral component of most spiritual emergencies” (p. 57) as they liberate individuals from the fear of death and lesser losses by opening them “to the experience of immortality” (p. 58). But how well equipped are individuals to manage the ensuing crisis of consciousness, or understand the potential impact it may have upon their lives? This article discusses male grief, loss and transformation by investigating one man’s very personal tragedy and how by his genius and his art he is able to manage and to resolve it.

This article contends that faced with the death of his son Hamnet, William Shakespeare uses the making of *Hamlet* (Dover Wilson, 1972) to re-conceive and externalize an inner representation of his dead son. On one level, Shakespeare’s public portrayal of the lost object of his affection enables him to accept its reality and repositions him to address a number of universal questions that arise from this change in relationship. On a deeper level it is hypothesized that the playwright’s personal loss caused him to experience a transformed or non-ordinary state of consciousness, coined by Grof and Grof (1989) as “spiritual emergency” (SE). Put simply, Shakespeare’s experience of loss triggers a significant crisis of consciousness which guides him towards a state of engagement with the collective unconscious,
enabling a spiritual transformation to occur which leads to his personality rebirth and healing.

It is proposed that Shakespeare may have used his experience of psycho-spiritual crisis to shape the content of *Hamlet*. The action of the play, and specifically Hamlet’s soliloquies, mirror the playwrights terrifying psychic journey and its conclusion, whilst the memory of his deceased son, Hamnet, intentionally gives substance to the play’s principle character.

Marking a significant breakthrough in the acknowledgment of transpersonal experiences as non-pathological (Lukoff, Lu & Turner, 1998), SE is recognized in the relatively new diagnostic category “Religious or Spiritual Problem” in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM IV) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). In *Hamlet* Shakespeare presents his audience with a number of notable characteristics of SE: “shamanistic initiatory crises,” a rite of passage for shamans-to-be in indigenous cultures, commonly involving physical illness and/or psychological crisis (Kalweit, 1998); processes of rebirth and renewal; sudden occurrence of paranormal experiences (Grof & Grof, 1989); peak experiences; and communication with spirit guides (Grof & Grof, 1990).

**Understanding Men: Loss and Gender**

In recent years, traditional Eurocentric stage models of grief and loss that encourage *decathexis* have been challenged by the healthier notion that the mourner maintains an ongoing relationship with the deceased (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996). Similarly, assumptions that men all grieve in the same manner has been superseded by the belief that an individual’s response to death is unique regardless of gender. Nevertheless, even though men are notionally free to maintain their relationships with the deceased and grieve their losses across a spectrum of gender responses, they still conform to established patterns of behavior and societal expectations. Men continue to fail to disclose their feelings to each other and to their families and make less use of mental health services than women.

In America, for example, Chethik (2003) claims that between 60 and 90 percent of the clients who use the services provided by hospital chaplains, bereavement counselors and hospices are women. He suggests that men avoid them because these services do not tend to reflect their styles of grieving, and that men perceive grief services as being for women.

**Men and Depression**

The World Health Organization reports an estimated 450 million people worldwide to have a mental health problem and that one in ten adults are affected by mental illness (Powell, 2002). In Britain, 1 in 4 people experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year and the most commonly diagnosed mental disorder (nine percent) is mixed anxiety and depression. However, it is suggested that depression in men may have been under diagnosed because they often present with different symptoms (Mental Health Foundation, 2008). Mental illness now contributes to 40 percent of the burden of disability in Europe and the Americas with 12 percent of men experiencing major depressive disorder during their lifetime (Powell, 2002).
Masculine and feminine depression share similar origins in important experiences of psychological loss and emotional trauma, and similar dynamics in the unconscious or conscious experiences of helplessness, hopelessness and feelings of low self esteem (Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999). In men, loss not only causes grief but is also a major cause of depression (Harvey & Miller, 2000). Pollack (1998) explains male depression as a traumatic disruption of their early holding environment, experienced as a premature psychic separation from both maternal and paternal caregivers and that, in order to protect themselves against further loss, men block all strongly overt feelings, except for anger and sexual feelings. Anger is valued as a false self-sufficiency through a process he calls “defensive autonomy” (p. 147).

Male depression can be disguised in physical illness or destructive behaviors (Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999) and unreported depression can lead to completed suicide (Pollack & Levant, 1998). British men are three times as likely as women to die by suicide, and in New Zealand suicide is the second most common cause of death for men (Bray & Hutchinson, 2007). Currently statistics indicate that women are diagnosed with depression twice as often as men (Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999). This suggests that men typically resist ideas that they might be depressed as it is unacceptable to their self image and they are less likely than women to express overt affects or mood shifts (Chethik, 2003: Staudacher, 1991). Clinicians too, unconsciously affected by societal gender stereotypes, are reluctant to ask men about depressive symptoms or inquire in any depth in the face of male resistance (Pollack & Levant, 1998).

_Grief Loss and Gender Coping Styles_

The literature suggests that men prefer “problem-focused” strategies to manage their grief, whilst strategies used by women, generally more accustomed to attending to their emotions and more able to carry out the tasks defined in grief work, are shown to be marginally more effective (Stroebe & Schut, 2001). Stroebe and Schut suggest that this is because men are more “avoidant in their coping styles” and by immersion in work block their emotions (p. 361). Surprisingly, Parkes (2001) notes that although psychoanalytic theory might suggest that repression of emotion should lead to mental health issues for men, research indicates the opposite. However, it is important to note that in the research neither gender’s assigned coping strategy in adjustment to grief has yet been conclusively proved superior to the other.

As most individuals do not fall neatly into stereotypical gender categories they have traits that Martin and Doka (2000) call “blended” suggesting that “while patterns of grieving are certainly influenced by gender, they are not determined by gender” (pp. 99-100). They assert that different styles of grieving are based on many complex factors including personality, gender and culture and that the interaction of these factors creates different outcomes for different people. Thus Martin and Doka’s continuum of styles of grieving does not identify differences in coping specifically in terms of gender. Simply, at one end of the continuum is the “intuitive griever” who manages feelings by focusing on the emotional dimensions of the loss through social support in keeping with the nature of traditional female coping styles. At the other end of the continuum is the “instrumental griever” who focuses more on the cognitive aspects of loss and grieves through activity and problem solving.
This style tends to be more solitary and private, concentrating on the management of thought, and is a style more usually associated with men. Martin and Doka suggest that individuals use a combination of both intuitive and instrumental ways of engaging with loss and grief rather than that most traditionally assigned as appropriate to gender.

Similarly with the experience of SE, although gender provides an initial predictor of coping style, it is only part of a complex interaction of developmental, cultural and biological components that will generally result in a blending of both stereotypical male and female responses.

**Loss and Spiritual Emergency**

It is suggested by Grof & Grof (1990) that loss of a loved one and the subsequent changes to future expectations caused by such losses may be significant enough to create the right environment for SE to present itself. As it makes these developmental adjustments, the psyche temporarily and powerfully attracts and submerges the ego allowing an opening for the influx of non-ordinary material, or “holotropic” (moving towards wholeness) phenomena. This may be experienced as a gradual emergence of consciousness or as the difficult but ultimately positive expression of SE. Significantly, according to the claims of Stan Grof’s holotropic theory, an individual’s cognitive abilities remain fully functioning throughout this experience (Grof & Grof, 1989).

**Grof’s Cartography of the Human Psyche**

SE is the subject of Grof and Grof’s *Spiritual Emergency* (1989), and *The Stormy Search for Self* (1990), but the “new paradigm” in which they find their context was crystallized in some detail by Stan Grof in his groundbreaking *Beyond the Brain* (1985). With a few exceptions, the basic principles of the paradigm and its cartography remain the same. In this archetypal map of the unconscious Grof adds to an existing psychodynamic “biographical” dimension two further dimensions which he describes as the “transpersonal” and the fundamental biological dimension, the “perinatal.”

Grof and Grof (1990) note the significance of death, death of the self in the self-actualizing process of transformation, and in the process of human birth. As Grof’s (1985) consciousness model is much richer and more complex than Jung’s, the perinatal dimension not only represents an interface between the individual “and elements of the collective unconscious” but also functions as an organizer of materials from “deep, intrinsic spiritual dimensions of the psyche” (p. 100).

Transpersonal experiences do not differentiate between the worlds of spirituality, mythology and archetypal forms, and the world of consensus reality. They offer, without the negotiation of the senses, direct access to the non-ordinary information of the collective unconscious where “all limitations appear to be transcended” (Grof & Grof, 1990, p. 151).

Transpersonal experiences, or Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness (NOSC) are genuine manifestations of the psyche that reveal that dimensions of human consciousness reach far beyond what is currently accepted by psychology and psychiatry. At a recollective-analytical level these transpersonal experiences are clearly “biographical” in nature. At an existential-experiential level experiences of
the perinatal dimension reflect strong connections with birth and death. Thus perinatal experiences represent an intersection between the personal and the transpersonal, which in turn reveal connections between the individual and the cosmos (Grof, 1985, 1996, 2000).

Grof’s (1985) map of the psyche outlines the domains of prenatal existence and the processes of birth itself. In the perinatal dimension Grof asserts that the fetus is conscious during its nine months and that pre- and perinatal events play a critical role in an individual’s psychological history, and creates systems of condensed experience (COEX), or memory aggregates, that constellate around these events. COEX have different layers of biographical, perinatal or archetypal material made accessible in the holotropic state.

Consequently, Grof’s subjects were not just able to access the personal or biographical dimensions of the unconscious, but eventually came to relive the traumatic processes of their own births, to unfold outwards beyond individual biography and access symbolic, visionary, collective, archetypal, and transpersonal levels of experiencing.

Grof (1985) describes the distinction and the link between the personal and the transpersonal as being at the level of the Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM). He defines BPM as four dynamic constellations or experiential patterns of the deep unconscious each “characterized by specific emotions, physical feelings, and symbolic images,” the COEX, corresponding to the four consecutive periods of biological delivery in childbirth (p. 499). The first matrix corresponds to undisturbed existence in the uterus. The second resonates with the trauma associated with the onset of uterine contractions against a closed cervix. The third describes the titanic struggle as the cervix is opening and delivery becomes possible. Finally, the fourth matrix represents delivery and the physical separation of the baby from the mother.

Thus, disturbances and experiences at any stage of the intrauterine and birth processes have been established by Grof as corresponding to certain generic existential conditions and psychopathological categories. For Grof, complex modes of human experience and behavior, both “normal” and pathological can be understood, and therapeutically influenced, by relating them to these foundational structures. By approaching them via these critical access points to the complex dimensionality of the psyche, Grof is able to reinterpret the standard biographical dimension. The inclusion of the perinatal aspect of personal psychology provides the doorway to transpersonal experience revealing a level of universal consciousness beyond the individual’s ordinary reach. Indeed, the perinatal trauma of SE, Grof suggests, might be as easily experienced by a group, or a culture, as it is by an individual.

Experiencing Spiritual Emergency
Grof & Grof (1990) propose that spiritual transformation, as a process, can be experienced subtly over time, whereas SE can be dramatic and sometimes more problematic. The latter inner experience can be felt as a suddenly spontaneous challenge to existing beliefs, and to existence itself, and may alter perception and bring discomfort with a once familiar world. SE is often experienced physically, as forceful energies and spontaneous tremors. At the perinatal level this is experienced through the archetypal “theme of war” and associated with male aggression, which
is “an important standard and characteristic aspect of experiential sessions” (Grof, 1985, p. 406).

Often the individual feels bound to disclose his or her non-ordinary state. It represents an enormous challenge to the individual, as he or she comes to terms with changes associated with both inner resources and outer relationships with the world. This can engender tremendous fear of the unknown and loss of control so that getting through the day and functioning in a familiar way becomes problematic. Normal activities become troublesome or overwhelming. Concentration is difficult to maintain. Experiencing frequent changes of mind may cause an individual to panic, and there will be feelings of powerlessness, guilt, and ineffectiveness. Commonly, individuals confront a sense of fear, vulnerability, and loneliness, which can range from “a vague perception of separateness from other people and the world to a deep and encompassing engulfment by existential alienation” (Grof & Grof, 1990, p. 52).

As boundaries that have been previously maintained between the consensus reality of the biographical dimension and the transpersonal and perinatal begin to dissolve, so the individual’s worldview is disintegrating, increasing emotional responses, physical stresses and pain. In an attempt to disassociate themselves from emerging memories, which are associated with or contain some fear, individuals become alienated from themselves. Confronting the notion of death is a “pivotal part of the transformation process and an integral component of most spiritual emergencies” (Grof & Grof, 1990, p. 57).

During SE the logical mind can be bypassed, or temporarily dies, while intuition, inspiration, and imagination assert themselves. The intellect too is superseded by true insightfulness. This process of renewal sees that the old pattern of thinking that is blocking the transformative process is destroyed by it in order that new learning, experience, and insights may take its place. In dealing with the traumas of the birth of the new the death of the old self must necessarily be mourned. Typical of the inverse logic of spiritual language, Grof and Grof (1990) suggest that, “what feels like total destruction of the ego is a broader, more encompassing sense of self” (p. 62). In the initial stages of SE they note that people may only briefly encounter heightened realms of experience, but the frequency can increase commensurate with the individuals’ awareness, acceptance and understanding of their transforming levels of consciousness. Ideally, in therapeutic settings, Grof and Grof argue that the individual must be allowed, without any form of medication that will block its natural progress, to work through the transformational process until peace and feelings of inner consistency that engage and link the positive experiences similar to those of BPM I and IV are achieved.

It is important to note the paucity and limitations of research into SE, as a relatively new and potentially controversial area of study, there is little or no statistical information relating to gender coping or incidence. All that one might say is that men and women may be reluctant to disclose such a deeply disturbing experience through conventional channels of support.
Coping with Loss: Shakespeare, Hamnet and Hamlet

Shakespeare’s Loss

It is suggested that in creating Hamlet, Shakespeare must have drawn upon some profound personal experiences.

Whatever he determined at the time, Shakespeare must have still been brooding in late 1600 and early 1601, when he sat down to write a tragedy whose doomed hero bore the name of his dead son. His thoughts may have been intensified by news that his elderly father was seriously ill back in Stratford, for the thought of his father’s death is deeply woven into the play. And the death of his son and the impending death of his father - a crisis of mourning and memory - could have caused a psychic disturbance that helps to explain the explosive power and inwardness of Hamlet. (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 8)

Shakespeare’s son Hamnet died in 1596, at the age of eleven, and his father John in 1601. Grof’s research indicates that such losses can trigger transformative experience and although there is no biographical evidence to indicate how Shakespeare might have responded to these deaths there is a body of critical opinion that suggests that these events must have influenced his work in some way (Bloom 1998; Greenblatt, 2004; Hammill, 2006).

Perhaps Quennell’s (1963) speculation that Hamnet’s death provoked some kind of moral crisis might suggest the kind of inner scrutiny that precedes a crisis of consciousness. For example, Shakespeare’s King John, which is generally thought to date between 1594 and 1597 placing it at the time of Hamnet’s death, contains the opening version of a theme that runs through many of his later tragedies:

“Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale
Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man…”

The human condition is both cruel and meaningless, and, because it lacks any discernible meaning, not only dark and tragic but wearisome and insignificant. (Quennell, 1963, p. 162)

In addition, Constance’s speech in King John, beginning with “Grief fills the room of my absent child” also draws upon Shakespeare’s grief at his great loss. Similarly, the lines “I am not mad: I would to heaven I were!” and “If I were mad, I should forget my son” (Act III, iv), are deeply reminiscent of the existential tensions within Hamlet.

It has been suggested that that from 1601 onward Shakespeare’s plays have been charged with a greater inner energy and consciousness (Greenblatt, 2004) and “a profound change in the weight and emphasis” (Welsh, 2000, p. 37). Certainly, loss of son and his father does seem to resonate with one of the major themes of Hamlet which explores the father and son dyad in four relationships. As Everett (1989) notes, these two losses “became one in Shakespeare’s mind, the seed from which his tragedy of a son began growing” (p. 34). This point is confirmed by Logan (2004) who notes Berryman’s observation that Shakespeare wrote a “father dominated tragedy,” which made him a “tragic playwright by two devastating crises.” What is
perhaps more telling is Berryman’s suggestion that Shakespeare is able through
Hamlet to create “an imagined life for his dead little son Hamnet.”

Continuing Bonds: Hamnet as the Inner Representation of the Dead Child
Rubin (1993) has suggested that as an extension of the father’s self, a son is
expected to rectify his father’s errors, and care about and support him in his dotage,
make a difference in the world and provide a second chance to replay and re-
experience aspects of the father’s childhood. However, when a son dies it “leaves
the parent with unfulfilled dreams for their offspring” and because “the chain in
their generational lines has been broken – a loss of continuity in the life cycle occurs”

Loss need not be experienced as a severing of bonds, subject to prescribed
stages or be gender specific. For example, Klass’ (2002) findings indicate that many
fathers manage their losses through the solace found in the maintenance and
integration of a new and ongoing relationship with their deceased children in their
day-to-day lives. The father, as part of this self-actualized bond with the son, holds
and engages with an “inner representation” of the child, with all his
“characterizations and thematic memories... and the emotional states connected
with the characterizations and memories” (p. 78). Thus, it is speculated here, that
Shakespeare has creatively externalized his inner representation of Hamnet as
Hamlet, which both strengthens and immortalizes their bond and enables him to
vividly depict his own journey of psychic discovery. Klass (2002) indicates that
phenomena such as “a sense of presence, hallucinations in any of the senses, belief
in the child’s continuing active influence on thoughts or events, or a conscious
incorporation of the characteristics or virtues of the dead child into the self” could
also have been experienced by Shakespeare, which would have added themes to
both this inner representation and the outer representation of the play (p. 79).

Shakespeare, Hamlet and Psychoanalysis
In the analysis of Shakespearean biography much is speculation and to assume that a
dramatic character speaks to the full inner experience of its creator rather than
simply answering the needs and devices of the drama and the audience is perilous.
Greenblatt (2004) notes that the motivation of Shakespeare is extensively
researched but thoroughly unknown. Nevertheless, he suggests, this “is no reason to
suppose that Shakespeare was unaffected by his son’s death” (p. 9). Equally, many
agree with Welsh’s (2000) contention that in Hamlet Hamlet’s “ego belongs to
Shakespeare himself” (p. 36).

Freud’s (1900) suggestion that in Hamlet the audience is confronted with
“the poet’s own psychology” (p. 7) observes that following the deaths of both his
father and his son, Shakespeare was made more vulnerable to his own “childish”
feelings towards his father and presumably to his needs as a father. Freud is very
clear about the psychological effects on Shakespeare and suggests that these
“neurotic symptoms” influence the creative construction of the play that argues a
therapeutic process for the creator in its creation. Claire (1985) adds that Freud
presumed that as a typical response to mourning Hamlet reflects “Shakespeare’s
own suicidal longings, his own weariness with this sterile promontory, his own sexual
fantasies and conflicts” (p. 298).
Freud (1997), recognizing the significance of Shakespeare’s losses, also infers a connection between Hamnet and Hamlet. “It is known, too, that Shakespeare’s son, who died in childhood, bore the name of Hamnet (identical with Hamlet)” (p. 160). Loss from bereavement, as Grof (2000) suggests, might well have exercised Shakespeare’s existential concerns and it is suggested here that this cathartic act of creation provides him with an opportunity to explore, vent and resolve his own very real psycho-spiritual crisis. In this case the process of SE has a positive outcome. Greenblatt argues that in Hamlet the playwright, arguably at the height of his powers and with greater awareness, begins to allow the “inner logic” of his creation to direct his writing and explains that Shakespeare’s “excision of motive” for Hamlet:

must have arisen from something more than technical experimentation; coming in the wake of Hamnet’s death, it expressed Shakespeare’s deepest perception of existence... The opacity was shaped by his experience of the world and of his own inner life. (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 9)

**Shakespeare’s Use of the Transpersonal**

Belief in transpersonal phenomena was widespread in Jacobean England. James I, Shakespeare’s most significant patron, wrote a tract on the nature and reality of witches. As he was aware that such beliefs were popular currency, it is not surprising that Shakespeare should wish to please his patron and his audience by incorporating the transpersonal in the advancement of plots and characters. The reality of transpersonal phenomena were roundly debated in Shakespeare’s time and belief in ghosts owes much to the demonological traditions and beliefs of the Renaissance (Nighan, 2004) and to the Elizabethan cosmological worldview (Tillyard, 1975). For example, in Henry IV, Part One (1597) there is a heated argument between Glendower, who claims that he can “call spirits from the vasty deep” and indulges in “deep experiments,” and Hotspur who regards such talk as “skimble-skamble stuff” (3.1.52, 48,150). In Hamlet (1601), the argument is repeated when Horatio initially and skeptically suspects the Ghost of Hamlet’s father as originating from Marcellus’ fantasy but is later explained in terms of the transpersonal phenomena that occurred before Julius Caesar’s death. The Ghost is seen on three key occasions and its force hovers darkly over a dissolute Denmark. Although the Ghost strongly affects his son’s opinion and behavior, it allows him a high level of pre-cognition without diminishing his ability to master his notions of “self-slaughter,” cognitive functioning and effective communication.

Transpersonal concerns are a recurring theme in many of Shakespeare’s plays. In Richard III (1592), it is a conscience-ridden hallucination, whereas in Hamlet and Macbeth (1605), the transpersonal is an integral and substantial part of the structure of the plot (Greenblatt, 2001). In Macbeth a floating dagger, unearthly witches, and prophetic apparitions supplement Banquo’s jeering and bloody phantom. Thus the transpersonal realm of experience provides a catalyst for action, an insight into character, and augments the impact of many key scenes. Significantly, Shakespeare’s early comedy A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1595), perhaps written at the time of Hamnet’s illness, encompasses three worlds or dimensions. Two of Grof’s cartography of the psyche are featured here: the biographical workaday world of the rude mechanicals and the romantic world of the aristocratic lovers; and the
transpersonal fairy world of Titania, Oberon and Puck, later reincarnated as Ariel in The Tempest (1610). In the former, the perinatal dimension is activated as all three worlds become intertwined during the course of the play. The transpersonal world dominates the others but as both the lovers and the mechanicals engage with the “children of Pan” they are literally and metaphorically transformed by their experience.

Shakespeare’s accumulated losses are, perhaps, evidence enough of the possibility of heightened spiritual awareness or SE. At the very least, Shakespeare’s inclusion of transpersonal material does speak of an understanding of the transpersonal and may support evidence of direct personal experience of the kinds of phenomena found in SE.

**Hamlet’s Spiritual Emergency**

Hamlet illustrates male grieving along a continuum (Martin & Doka, 2000). As an “intuitive griever” Hamlet does not always follow a macho script: he is reflective rather than action-oriented, and concerned to maintain strong links with his natural parents. However, as an “instrumental griever” he identifies with and measures himself against other males; seeking the confidence of other young men, he must mourn his losses privately. Measured against the general research and the myth of stereotype, Hamlet is typical in the way that he “blends” both genders’ grieving styles. However, his responses are unique and individual.

In Hamlet’s dialectic between reality and appearance it is Hamlet’s self-conscious belief that whatever is happening to him is stranger and deeper than is represented by his mourning. Indeed, Claudius’ description of Hamlet’s “transformation” (2. 2. 10) as a dual process involving exterior and interior change suggests that it is so great that Hamlet is no longer recognizable as the same young man, suggesting that transformation initiated by loss has become Hamlet’s central point of focus.

**Mapping Hamlet’s Perinatal Journey**

**The Soliloquies**

Hamlet’s seven soliloquies provide a window to both the character’s and his creator’s inner processes and simultaneously to their perinatal and transpersonal experiences. As noted above, complex modes of human experience can be therapeutically influenced by relating them to foundational structures called Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM) which, when activated, “can result in complex and realistic reproduction of all the experiences ... associated with various forms of war” (Grof, 1985, p. 412). The perinatal dimension also provides access to transpersonal experience which would normally be beyond the reach of the individual psyche. An analysis of Hamlet using these trans-dimensional access points enables a reframing of the standard postnatal biographical explanations of Hamlet’s behavior. It is suggested here that Hamlet’s and, by inference, Shakespeare’s behavior and experiences can be developmentally mapped and interpreted through his seven soliloquies.
Soliloquy One: O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt... (1.2.129-149)
The first of Grof’s matrices, “primal union with mother” (BPM I) describes the symbiotic relationship between mother and child. Thus, the first soliloquy indicates Hamlet’s harmonious family relationships prior to the onset of SE and the death of his father. In its expression of his idyllic past, painful awareness of his present loss, and imminent change in his future prospects, it vitally illustrates the shattering transition between Grof’s first and second BPM. Here Hamlet examines his past and his particular disappointment and suffering around the loss of his father and remarriage of his mother, reiterating the theme from King John that life is “weary, stale, flat and unprofitable.” Denmark has become “rank and gross in nature” and there are few recollections of good experiences and feelings. The new husband, Claudius, is experienced as a threatening and destabilizing influence and Gertrude, his mother, the literal source of Hamlet’s inner security, is revealed as inconstant. Grof and Grof (1990) have observed that in BPM II individuals view the world negatively, “the persons reliving episodes of intrauterine disturbances, or ‘bad womb’ experiences, have a sense of dark and ominous threat and often feel they are being poisoned” (p. 147).

Soliloquy Two: O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?... (1.5.92-112.)
“Cosmic engulfment and no exit or hell” (BPM II), is the first clinical stage of birth, where there are uterine contractions but the cervix is closed. At this point in his SE Hamlet, firmly embedded in BPM II, as a helpless victim accesses COEX of a dark and menacing world, claustrophobic, torturous, nightmarish, the religious prototype for Hell and his descent into this underworld is a common experiential variant of the second matrix. Hamlet’s second soliloquy is a painful, emotional and physical response to his father’s ghost accompanied by a persistent sense of paranoia. It is his response to a negative COEX system, a powerful cluster of emotional events drawn from the biographical, perinatal and transpersonal dimensions. Grof has suggested that,

Reliving this stage of birth is one of the worst experiences we can have during self-exploration that involves holotropic states. We feel caught in a monstrous claustrophobic nightmare, exposed to agonizing emotional and physical pain, and have a sense of utter helplessness and hopelessness. (Grof, 2000, pp. 41-3)

Soliloquy Three: O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!... (2.2.555-612)
This soliloquy indicates a transition between BPM II and III and takes Hamlet into the “the death-rebirth struggle” (BPM III). In this second clinical stage of delivery, uterine contractions continue and the cervix is open, allowing for the gradual propulsion of the fetus down the birth canal. The fetus makes contact with a variety of biological materials, and experiences crushing sensations, suffocation, and struggles for survival, as the body is propelled down and out of the birth canal. Grof observes that in this matrix individuals experience a discharge of energy, sexual excitement, and an inter-play of self-destructive and destructive experiences. The distinction between this matrix and the last is Hamlet’s stronger association with the roles of the aggressor and an observer rather than the victimized and downtrodden. Hamlet,
emerging painfully from his appalling encounter with the Ghost and the truth, is tremendously energized, but this power is initially unfocussed in his frenetic outpouring until he is able to establish a plan to ‘catch the conscience of the king’.

**Soliloquy Four:** To be, or not to be, that is the question... (3.1.56-89)
The fourth and fifth soliloquies are specifically resonant of BPM III. These soliloquies appear in Act III of the play. In the fourth soliloquy Hamlet swings into an almost detached contemplation of existence that could be reframed as a growing acceptance of his death-rebirth process and accommodation of holotropic experiences. Nevertheless, his sexual arousal so clearly focused on Ophelia, becomes destructive as he rushes to free himself from the maternal body.

**Soliloquy Five:** ‘Tis now the very witching time of night... (3.2.391-402)
Although this soliloquy is consistent with the characteristics of BPM III it also regresses to recover elements of BPM II and dangerously reasserts the transpersonal dimension prior to the manic confrontation of his mother.

**Soliloquy Six:** Now might I do it pat, now a’ is a-praying... (3.3.72-96)
The sixth soliloquy firmly establishes Hamlet in BPM III and also recovers the detachment of the fourth soliloquy as he enjoys a moment of control toying with the possibility of killing Claudius. However, Hamlet’s transformative process is unguided and in this vortex of intense energy and trauma it is spontaneously directed toward action untempered by conscience with the murder of Polonius, "When the experience of BPM III comes closer to resolution, it becomes less violent and disturbing. The prevailing atmosphere is that of extreme passion and driving energy of intoxicating intensity" (Grof, 2000, p. 48).

**Soliloquy Seven:** How all occasions do inform against me... (4.4.33-66)
In Act IV, soliloquy seven illustrates a transition between BPM III and IV the “death and rebirth experience.” Consequently, Hamlet may be viewed in Act V as having many of the experiences consonant with BPM IV including the heightened awareness associated with completion of the birth process. In this third clinical stage of delivery propulsion through the birth canal is completed and followed by an overwhelming sense of relief and relaxation. The eventual severing of physical connection with the mother is both an actual separation and a final resolution. In the play an exiled Hamlet is literally and metaphorically disconnected from his mother and motherland, and in terms of development he is forced into a full separation from the parent figures. This repositions Hamlet and allows previous reference-points, formed and imprinted by the trauma of birth, to be destroyed. In this “ego-death,” which is a purely symbolic event, he is stripped of all resources and possessions save his physical self (Grof & Grof, 1980, p. 28). Grof (1998, p. 151), quoting Abraham a Sancta Clara, a seventeenth-century German Augustinian monk, sums up Hamlet’s new position as, “The man who dies before he dies, does not die when he dies.” This “dying before dying” has played an important role in all religious traditions and Hamlet is able to lose his fear of death and become more comfortable with its experiential territory - an indication that Shakespeare’s own fears are mitigated.
For some this death is experienced as fearfully as the real thing. However, ego-death is not the death of the ego since this is still required for functioning. It is simply the ultimate detachment from the old and familiar existence – the ego being destroyed in order to accommodate a more expanded self-definition. What is actually dying is Hamlet’s false self and he is able to return to Denmark as a young man in the final process of healing and transformation. This heightened consciousness of the playwright truly emerges on a cosmic scale in Hamlet’s seventh soliloquy when his painful personal experiences of loss are weighed against humanity’s capacity for self-destruction and deception, which suggests to him that his perception of consensus reality is flawed and his inaction perhaps justified rather than shameful and his final lines are delivered with sardonic humor.

Act V: The Transformation of Hamlet
The powerful transformational journey of Shakespeare so graphically described in Hamlet is articulated by Grof’s holotropic process. At a biographical level Hamnet’s loss influences the creation of Hamlet and Hamlet enabling Shakespeare to reinforce his inner representation of the deceased son and to nourish their ongoing relationship. At a transpersonal level Hamnet is resurrected as Hamlet so that as the Ghost father Shakespeare is able to feel affective, forgiven and unforgotten in this newly reframed relationship. And at the perinatal level Shakespeare is confirmed and reassured in his position as both father and mother of Hamnet as he is reconceived and birthed as Hamlet by his father/playwright in and from the body of Hamlet. Thus the matrices encompass the lambent pre-perinatal characteristics and increasingly painful spiritual opening of Shakespeare/Hamlet’s loss in Act I, through to Shakespeare/Hamlet’s birth as an individuated, reconciled, broader and intentionally aware consciousness in Act V.

Hamlet returns to Denmark to face his death with a deeper understanding of himself, which as Tillyard (1975) notes to the Elizabethan, is a paramount human task “To know your self was not egoism but the gateway to all virtue” (p. 79). Shakespeare returns to himself. Hamlet scholars and critics alike have puzzled and argued over the play’s final Act. There is no doubt that Hamlet is finally and tragically redeemed and the source of his redemption lies in his journey of psychic renewal through a practical process of mourning not consciously self-directed but spiritually inspired – the exposed unconscious of a playwright arguably at the height of his powers.

Conclusion
Seen alongside male grief and loss theory, Grof’s holotropic cartography provides a useful heuristic device to illustrate and discuss how men might better understand, explain, and manage loss. Just like the loss that triggers it, SE is a choiceless event and plunges individuals into changes in consciousness that they might be poorly prepared for, cannot manage and do not understand. Like Shakespeare, men are faced with accepting and integrating this new material over time as best they can or to seek ways to suppress its influence.

As caring friends and interested professionals, the experience of SE challenges our beliefs about the world and deepens our understanding of the grieving process and what men need to get through it. Men in SE need to be given
the opportunity to safely express their inner transformations, to be heard and to be understood. However, there is little awareness in our communities of what consciousness transforming crises as a result of loss might be like for men and it is suggested that such deeply personal events go largely unreported or unrecognized.

There is considerable research which supports and recognizes spirituality, spiritual practice, and balance as having a positive affect on an individual's overall health and resilience. Perhaps, it is time to raise awareness about how men have been transformed by their losses and to more closely examine how that inner transformation has occurred and can be used to support others.

Appendix

Hamlet – The soliloquies

Soliloquy One
(1.2.129-149)
O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew, (130)
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this,
But two months dead, nay not so much, not two,
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother, (140)
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly-heaven and earth
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet within a month,
Let me not think on't...frailty thy name is woman!
A little month or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body
Like Niobe all tears, why she, even she-
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer-married with my (150)
uncle
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules, within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes
She married. O most wicked speed...to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good,
But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.
Soliloquy Two
(1.5.92-112.)
O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? O fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
But bear me stiffly up...Remember thee?
Ay thou poor ghost whiles memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory
I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past (100)
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter - yes by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables, meet it is I set it down
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain,
At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark...
So, uncle, there you are. Now, to my Word, (110)
It is ‘Adieu, adieu, remember me.’...
I have sworn’t.

Soliloquy Three
(2.2.555-612)
O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit; and all for nothing! (560)
For Hecuba!
What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? what would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? he would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears; yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak, (570)
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made: am I a coward?
Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face,
Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i' th' throat
As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?
Ha, 'swounds, I should take it: for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall (580)
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O, vengeance!
Why, what an ass am I. This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing like a very drab: (590)
A stallion ! fie upon't! foh!
About, my brain; hum, I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul, that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions:
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks; (600)
I'll tent him to the quick: if a' do blench
I know my course.... The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil, and the devil hath power
T' assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me; I'll have grounds
More relative than this - the play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

Soliloquy Four
(3.1.56-89)
To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die, to sleep - (60)
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished to die to sleep!
To sleep, perchance to dream, ay there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
Must give us pause - there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life:
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, (70)
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disparized love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin; who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will, (80)
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action…. Soft you now,
The fair Ophelia - Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered.

Soliloquy Five
(3.2.391- 402)
'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on: soft, now to my mother -
O heart, lose not thy nature, let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom,
Let me be cruel not unnatural.
I will speak daggers to her, but use none,
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites, (400)
How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!
Soliloquy Six
(3.3.72-96)
Now might I do it pat, now a’ is a-praying -
And now I’ll do’t, and so a’ goes to heaven,
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned:
A villain kills my father, and for that
I his sole son do this same villain send
To heaven....
Why, this is bait and salary, not revenge.
A’ took my father grossly, full of bread, (80)
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May,
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought,
’Tis heavy with him: and am I then revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No!
Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent,
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th’incestuous pleasure of his bed, (90)
At game, a-swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in’t,
Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell whereto it goes; my mother stays,
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Soliloquy Seven
(4.4.33-66)
How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more:
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple (40)
Of thinking too precisely on th’ event
A thought which quartered hath but one
part wisdom,
And ever three parts coward - I do not know
Why yet I live to say ’This thing’s to do,,'
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
To do’t... Examples gross as earth exhort me.
Witness this army of such mass and charge
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event, (50)
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell.... Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour’s at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep? while, to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men, (60)
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

References


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Cecil B. DeMille: Hollywood Macho Man and the Theme of Masculinity within His Biblical (and Other) Cinema

Anton Karl Kozlovic

Cecil B. DeMille, the legendary co-founder of Hollywood, progenitor of Paramount studios and unsung auteur was a macho man and master of the American cinema whose indelible biblical epics strongly exuded the resonance of masculinity. Not only were many of his sacred characters scripturally correct, but they frequently reflected DeMille’s own virile persona-cum-ethos. Utilizing textually based, humanist film analysis as the guiding methodological lens, the critical film, religion and DeMille literature was reviewed and his biblical (and other) cinema selectively scanned to reveal the theme of masculinity engineered therein. It was concluded that DeMille’s trademark aesthetic style and phenomenal box office successes were firmly rooted in his personal courage ethic, directorial control needs and manly idiosyncrasies. Further research into gender studies, masculinity studies, DeMille studies and the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film was warranted, highly recommended and is already long overdue.

Introduction: The Master of the American Biblical Epic
Producer-director¹ Cecil B. DeMille² (1881-1959), affectionately known as “C.B.” (to close friends), “Generalissimo” (to commentators) and “Mr. DeMille” (to everyone else), was a seminal co-founder of Hollywood and a progenitor of Paramount studio who helped turn an obscure Californian orange grove into an international movie center that became the synonym for commercial filmmaking worldwide (Birchard, 2004; DeMille & Hayne, 1960; Edwards, 1988; Essoe & Lee, 1970; Higashi, 1985, 1994; Higham, 1973; Koury, 1959; Louvish, 2008; Noerdlinger, 1956; Orrison, 1999; Ringgold & Bodeen, 1969). Not only was DeMille a legitimate if frequently unsung auteur, but in Gore Vidal’s (1995, p. 303) estimation, he was the “auteur of auteurs,” and according to film historian Sumiko Higashi (1994, p. 5), he had “left enormous traces of his authorship long before Francois Truffaut and Andrew Sarris made the term auteur fashionable in cinema studies.”

DeMille was a confirmed Episcopalian Christian³ and a self-confessed pop culture professional (DeMille & Hayne, 1960, p. 195) who grew to become the undisputed master of the American biblical epic with such indelible classics as The Ten Commandments (1923), The King of Kings (1927), Samson and Delilah (1949) and
The Ten Commandments (1956). As Jon Solomon (2001, p. 175) noted: “DeMille’s parting of the Red Sea in 1956 and his Samsonian destruction of the temple of Dagon [in 1949]...will be remembered as the most representative and iconographical Old Testament depictions of the twentieth century.” Not surprisingly, DeMille was variously tagged “high priest of the religious genre” (Holloway, 1977, p. 26), a “prophet in celluloid” (Billy Graham quoted in Andersen, 1970, p. 279), and the “arch apostle of spectacle” (Clapham, 1974, p. 21), amongst many other honorific titles, artistic hosannas and industry accolades (see Essoe & Lee, 1970, pp. 245-247). Indeed, one Protestant church leader proudly proclaimed that: “The first century had its Apostle Paul, the thirteenth century had St. Francis, the sixteenth had Martin Luther and the twentieth has Cecil B. DeMille” (Manfull, 1970, p. 357).

Despite all this professional praise, and having successfully achieved one of his life’s ambitions, namely: “my ministry was making religious movies and getting more people to read the Bible than anyone else ever has” (Orrison, 1999, p. 108), DeMille’s accomplishments were frequently ignored, dismissed or disdained by academia, the cognoscenti, literati and aesthete. For example, film commentator Barry Norman (1985, p. 182) claimed that Samson and Delilah “was certainly the worst and most absurd of all his films in that genre,” and that DeMille “was a man who thought big—not often deeply, but big” (p. 160). Biographer David Thomson (1995, p. 182) considered DeMille to be “silliest in his biblical and Roman films,” auteur advocate Andrew Sarris (1968) had excluded DeMille from his list of pantheon directors whilst film historians Giannetti and Eyman (1996, p. 40) argued that: “It is no longer fashionable to admire DeMille.”

Even Art Arthur’s (1970, p. 283) decades old claim still rings annoyingly true today, namely: “Cecil B. DeMille was Hollywood’s best known unknown” despite having been an active filmmaker from 1913 to 1959, a filmmaking pioneer, and an industry legend with over seventy feature films to his directorial credit (52 silent, 18 sound). Not long after his 1959 death, many professionals were still ignorant of DeMille’s filmic output, let alone his numerous industry advancements and artistic accomplishments. For example, in 1967, the Museum of Modern Art critic, Kirk Bond opined: “DeMille does really seem a major filmmaker...Perhaps in another few years...we can—with, let us hope, more films to go by—begin to have some real idea of what DeMille actually did” (Card, 1979, p. 119). Regrettably, the academic community and the general public is still waiting for this to happen, with only a few tantalizing dribs-and-drabs arising in the meantime. For example, DeMille’s directorial peer George Cukor recently confessed:

A long time ago I thought what he [DeMille] did was a big joke, just preposterous, and I couldn’t understand why the audience went for it in such a big way. There were always all sorts of orgies with belly dancers, veils and all the trappings. The eroticism was a joke. Then I saw The Ten Commandments [1956]...it was preposterous from the word go but I suddenly saw something new there, something which had escaped me before: the story telling was wonderful. The way that man could tell a story was fascinating—you were riveted to your seat. That’s exactly what he was: a great, great story teller. It was often ridiculous with all those excesses and froth but the man did tell a
story. That was De Mille’s great talent and the secret behind his popular success (Long, 2001, p. 27).

Of course, this very same storytelling talent was behind the success of the rest of DeMille’s filmic œuvre, and a significant part of that great ability was the masculine resonance that he injected into his character constructions, which itself was often a muted reflection of DeMille’s own macho man persona. Indeed, the redoubtable C.B. was legendary throughout Hollywood as a man’s man, a virile filmmaker and an enfant terrible whose creativity and forcefulness sometimes bordered upon the dictatorial.

Consequently, not many scholars have attempted an encomium of DeMille’s work, or explored his complex, multi-faceted nature, or even tried to extract the constitutive elements of his trademark auteur signature. Let alone explore his other personal stamps embedded within his films that had spanned the genesis of Hollywood, the birth of feature length silent films, the arrival of sound films, the rise of Technicolor, the advent of the wide screen and the challenge of the small screen. As Eric Smoodin (2000, p. 251) lamented: “De Mille rarely receives the serious academic recognition and study that he deserves.” This is a scholarly shame in need of urgent correction. Therefore, utilizing textually based, humanist film analysis as the guiding methodological lens (i.e., examining the textual world inside the frame, but not the world outside the frame—Bywater & Sobchack, 1989), the critical film, religion and DeMille literature was selectively reviewed, and the theme of masculinity within his biblical (and other) cinema was briefly explicated herein to begin to redress that scholarly oversight; especially given the paucity of Hollywood-masculinity studies today (Cohan, 1997; Cohan & Hark, 1993; Jeffords, 1994; Lehman, 2001; Mellen, 1977; Trice & Holland, 2001).

DeMille’s John Wayne Masculinity Before John Wayne

Authentic American masculinity in the iconic John Wayne mould is comprised of a combination of the following personal attributes, namely:

- rational, practical, objective
- courageous, independent, adventurous
- aggressive, athletic, strong
- stoic, tough, competitive (Meek, 2007, p. 1).

These masculine attributes are also an apt description of both DeMille-the-man and DeMille-the-pioneering-producer-director whose rugged individuality and dogged persistence during the Golden Age of Hollywood pre-dated John Wayne’s archetypal maleness by decades (Freedman, 2007; Sanderson, 2002, 2004). Put simply, DeMille was a man’s man who “loved gutsiness!” (Basquette, 1990, p. 132) and was full of energy, ambition, self-confidence, passion and artistry. He also admired strong-willed and independent-minded people and thus lauded courage but despised weakness in his personal, professional and on-screen life. He could not “forgive psychic disabilities...The immature, although gifted, were not to be nursed. If you had guts you could get what you wanted; he had got his, without help” (de Mille, 1990, p. 174). This basically essentialist conception of masculinity became a key
DeMillean theme and an often-overlooked component of his auteur signature that stayed virtually unchanged during his 1913-1959 career; despite the public’s changing perceptions of masculinity. As his adversarial niece Agnes de Mille described him:

Cecil was like a young bull: dynamic, male, determined, and sassy. Wasting no time in subtlety, he went directly after what he wanted. He was without physical fear. “He had the courage of a lion,” said Gloria Swanson to me in later years. He had no patience with fear, within himself or anyone else. He demonstrated this a thousand times over throughout his career. The same was true of pain, for which he had an almost limitless tolerance – so why didn’t others? I once heard him offer an extra playing a naked Aztec warrior [The Woman God Forgot (1917)] forty dollars for sliding down a wall. The man’s back was flayed, but he got his forty bucks. (I think Uncle Ce would not have accepted forty bucks for the same pain, nor four thousand. Possibly a hundred times that amount – possibly – but certainly he would have delivered for free, without question, if he had a guarantee that his pain would benefit the picture). (de Mille, 1990, pp. 162-163)

Nor was such DeMillean machismo transient or limited to youthful enthusiasm during Hollywood’s stumbling steps towards establishing a uniquely American screen culture. As Jean Arthur (playing Calamity Jane) reported regarding his bravura behavior during filming of his 1937 Western, The Plainsman: “I had to learn to use a bullwhip, because Calamity was a two-fisted bullwhacking beauty. Practicing on DeMille, I cut him across the wrist with it. He’s been so splendid. He wouldn’t let me strike an extra he had hired to be struck until I had first practiced on him” (Tomlinson, 1994, p. 16). This tough masculine ethic infused all of his films, and with the very willing support of his spirited scriptwriter Jeanie Macpherson. As Alexa L. Foreman explained regarding their working relationship:

Macpherson and DeMille held a common belief that would be the basis for every screenplay on which they collaborated: they despised weakness in men and women. In Macpherson’s scripts, weak men were taken advantage of and degraded, and weak women were shallow, gold-digging, and destructive creatures who went from one rich man to the next. The screenwriter believed that men and women could learn from experience, however, and change weak or evil ways, and she demonstrated this in her early social dramas. Both Macpherson and DeMille celebrated the hero and the heroine—biblical, historical, or fictional—and praised their courage and perseverance. (Foreman, 1998, p. 254)

Even during the famous clash with John Ford over the Screen Directors Guild loyalty oath near the end of DeMille’s directorial career, Ford claimed: “I admire C.B.’s guts and courage” (McBride, 2003, p. 483), if not his politics and power tactics fuelled by anti-Communist hysteria during the McCarthy era.

DeMille’s machismo also helps explain why his screen “heroes were equally stereotyped: untroubled by doubts, though frequently tempted by sin. If they were
true DeMille heroes, however, they repented, and after suffering intense remorse, they recognized God in time. The mind divided, the mind doubting and lost, was not for the Boss. God always came through for him in the nick, right on schedule” (De Mille, 1990, p. 186). DeMille’s admiration of strength and courage coupled with his own personal power and persistence helps account for the storytelling success of his nearly failed foray into the musical genre, Madam Satan. As Richard Barrios (1995, p. 259) argued, the music was not good and DeMille was poor at handling the staging but: “It’s that cocky damn-the-torpedoes DeMille spark that pushes it on. As he does in even his silliest pseudo-historical opuses, he goes for the hard sell with conviction and flair and force, and darned if he doesn’t make it work.” In effect, DeMille’s masculine spirit had exuded through the silver screen.

Since DeMille-the-macho-man “liked a show of spirit in a girl” (De Mille, 1973, p. 274), he greatly admired courage in his female actors, which he actively sought and they frequently supplied. For example, Barbara Stanwyck was cast in his Americana railway film, Union Pacific, playing the plucky Mollie Monahan because: “Barbara’s name is the first that comes to mind, as one on whom a director can always count on to do her work with all her heart” (DeMille & Hayne, 1960, p. 333). Why? Because as Joel McCrea (playing Jeff Butler) put it, “in everything she is fearless and has more guts than most men.” To prove it, a high-energy Stanwyck “scrambles over the top of a railroad car, spins on a brake wheel between two of them, operates a handcar with McCrea, runs after a wagon and jumps onto it, and battles her share of attacking Indians” (Reid, npd, p. 174).

DeMille’s appreciation of bravery also helps explain his championing of the courageous Gloria Swanson circa 1920s, especially when she let a lion actually paw her naked, prostrated back in Male and Female during the Babylonian flashback scene enticingly entitled “The Lion’s Bride.” This scene went on to become one “of the most famous in the De Mille filmography” (Bowers, 1982, p. 691). To achieve this dramatically dangerous pose: “Canvas was laid on her bare back and the front paws of the lion placed on top. The canvas was gradually eased out from under the animal’s paws until they were directly in contact with her flesh. Finally the lion was induced to roar by having whips cracked in its presence” (Wise & Ware, 1973, p. 75). Swanson was “terrified” (Swanson, 1981, p. 506) but continued working like a trooper, which made DeMille even happier. As Agnes de Mille (1992, p. 57) reported: “The cameras ground safely from above, and Cecil’s heart swelled with pride as the brave and beautiful young girl, his ‘Little Fella,’ dared expose her flesh to laceration at his bidding.” This was a particularly brave act by Swanson, but even more so considering that the very same “lion clawed a man to death two weeks after the scene was shot” (Charyn, 1989, p. 99). DeMille-the-brave had found another gutsy girl whom he could admire, deploy and make world-famous in his repeated role as a Hollywood star-maker.

This same admiration-cum-expectation for actor bravery persisted until the other end of DeMille’s directorial career, notably in his 1950s Oscar-winning circus epic, The Greatest Show on Earth. Gloria Grahame (playing Angel) pleased DeMille immensely by refusing to have a stand-in and let an elephant place its foot inches away from her face whilst she lay on the ground. As she recalled: “I was petrified. You know there was one retake on the scene. The elephant came so close he left a smudge on my nose” (Hannsberry, 1998, p. 182). Such demonstrable courage was
not only approved of by DeMille-the-brave, but DeMille-the-publicist utilized it for its immense PR value (Parish & Bowers, 1973, p. 286) to keep DeMille-the-businessman satisfied. As a corollary of courage, DeMille also admired the virtues of firmness and perseverance. As cameraman Karl Struss told actor Julia Faye: “You know, C.B. admires you because you make up your mind and you stick to it” (Eyman, 1987, p. 5). It was another quintessential masculine trait championed personally and professionally by DeMille. Not surprisingly, trial-by-fire was also a common plot element within many of his films; but most notably in The Godless Girl, The Golden Chance, The Road to Yesterday, Saturday Night and Triumph (Birchard, 2004, pp. 171, 191), thus further cementing DeMille’s master of macho reputation.

Some Power Permutations and Machismo Traits within DeMille’s Biblical Cinema

DeMille’s machismo found its natural home in Samson and Delilah, the Old Testament story about the world’s strongest man and his affair with the deliciously duplicitous Delilah. Denise Noe (2007, p. 4) considered this film’s masculine and feminine archetypes to be “classic cinematic cheese,” just as DeMille had proudly pitched it to the Paramount executives of his day:

…I asked Dan Groesbeck to draw a simple sketch of two people - a big, brawny athlete and, looking at him with an at once seductive and coolly measuring eye, a slim and ravishingly attractive young girl. When the executives trooped in…l…brought out the Groesbeck sketch. “How is that,” I asked them, “for the subject of a picture?” They were enthusiastic. That was movies. That was boy-meets-girl—and what a boy, and girl! “That, gentlemen,” I said, “is Samson and Delilah” (DeMille & Hayne, 1960, pp. 364-365).

As DeMille argued elsewhere: “We’ll sell it as a story of faith, the story of the power of prayer. That’s for the censors and the women’s organizations. For the public it’s the hottest love story of all time” (Koury, 1959, p. 206).

This sacred narrative is full of physical acts of bravado, including Samson’s bare-handed battle with a young lion (Judg. 14: 5-6), the killing of a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass (Judg. 15:14-15), and the single-handed collapsing of Dagon’s temple (Judg. 16:25-30). The muscular star of this DeMillean epic was the beefy Victor Mature who, unfortunately, exhibited many personal phobias and other character weaknesses (Broccoli & Zec, 1998, pp. 117-121; Ragan, 1985, p. 131) that eventually triggered DeMille’s now legendary “100 per cent yellow” (Higham, 1973, p. 287) berating of him. As DeMille bitterly claimed: “The man [Mature] is the greatest coward ever born. I’ve never seen a man or a child as afraid as he. He was so terrified to stand between those two columns and pretend to push. Now those columns were steel inside—they were steel. You couldn’t have pushed them down—grappling chains and vices wouldn’t have pulled them down” (BYU, MSS 1400, CBD, Box 13, Folder 18, 10 June 1957, Samson and Delilah Notes, npn).

Despite the inherent physical safety on this absolutely necessary film prop, the excessively worried Mature “sent for his agent [Herman Citrom]...Well, he finally went up there, but...he laid his hand gently on the columns and pretended to push. The man who pushed the columns was Kay Bell, shooting from the back of Samson. All that terrific stuff was Kay Bell. You couldn’t get Victor Mature...I led a lion in on a
leash and he went out the other door so fast...Now there were 25 or 30 women standing around, there were children, there were 50 men probably, and nobody moved. But M. [Mature] went out of there like a dose of salts. I have never seen such complete fear” (BYU, MSS 1400, CBD, Box 13, Folder 18, 10 June 1957, Samson and Delilah Notes, npn, LHS 199, RHS 10). “I’ve never seen such abject cowardice. I’ve never seen anything like it. Jody [DeMille’s young grandson] could go up and lick him [Mature]—he could do it—if he could catch him” (BYU, MSS 1400, CBD, Box 13, Folder 18, 10 June 1957, Samson and Delilah Notes, npn, LHS 217, RHS 111).

Of course, the theme of weakness was another unavoidable feature of Judges 13-16 and *Samson and Delilah* that Victor Mature could embody splendidly. For example, Samson’s *spiritual* weakness towards his holy duties as God’s judge led to his demise. Samson’s *acquisitive* weakness for Semadar (Angela Lansbury) made him a target of scheming Philistine authorities that led to his public humiliation. Samson’s *perceptual* weakness in overlooking the young, sexually frustrated Delilah (Hedy Lamarr) and the rejection of her puppy love obsession that drove her down the path of revenge. Samson’s *lustful* weakness for the mature, sultry and very seductive Delilah (Hedy Lamarr) led to his entrapment, maiming and imprisonment. Samson’s *intellectual* weakness (and/or low frustration tolerance) of Delilah’s nagging led him to reveal the secret of his phenomenal strength that led to his subsequent capture, blindness and death. Samson’s lone wolf habits-cum-*military* weakness led to his capture by Philistine soldiers. Samson’s eventual *physical* weakness led to the Philistines destroying his eyes, enslaving and humiliating him, and Samson’s weakness of *faith* kept him a mill-slave suffering physical, mental and spiritual torments.

However, when rejecting his weaknesses, Samson’s strength returned (along with his long hair) and he redeemed himself by collapsing Dagon’s temple upon himself and his Philistine captors in a revengeful act of suicidal terrorism (Wicker, 2003). DeMille’s Samson is now a hero in God’s eye, his people’s eyes, the audience’s eyes, and DeMille’s directorial eyes. The weak strongman was made powerful again, just as DeMille had turned the incredibly phobic Victor Mature into an on-screen (if not an off-screen) hero. Not surprisingly, Louis H. Evans (First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood) wrote to DeMille after a preview of *Samson and Delilah* and said: “Thank you for your own type of *virile ministry*...God bless you in your work of making the Bible a living book” (BYU, MSS 1400, CBD, Box 13, Folder 18, 13 July 1949, Letter from to Louis H. Evans to Cecil B. DeMille) [my emphasis]. The DeMille-the-virile-filmmaker would have been very happy with that comment, one feels.

DeMille’s lauding of strength, courage and masculinity also helps explain his virile Jesus (H.B. Warner) in his silent Christ film, *The King of Kings* and his non-meek, non-stuttering Moses in both versions of his *The Ten Commandments* (played by Theodore Roberts and Charlton Heston respectively), particularly the construction of Moses-as-a-warrior-king in his second Moses movie (which differed from his Moses-as-a-wild-eyed-prophet in his silent version). Indeed, Charlton Heston’s Prince Moses had admired, supported and rewarded courage amongst his subjugated Hebrew workers. When the plucky stonecutter Joshua (John Derek) struck an Egyptian overlord (itself punishable by death) to stop a trapped old woman, Yochabel (Martha Scott) being crushed to death by massive stone blocks, and then boldly spoke the
truth about the poorly fed workers, an aggrieved taskmaster immediately wanted Joshua put to death. However, Prince Moses intervened claiming: “The man has courage,” he allowed Joshua to live and even accepted his grassroots criticism. They then broke into the Egyptian temple granary to gather the stores therein and feed the Hebrew workers; much to the chagrin of the self-serving priests who wanted all the grain for themselves and their gods.

DeMille’s courage trait and desires also helps explain his support of Mormon biblical artist Arnold Friberg and his painted illustrations of Moses for the second *The Ten Commandments*. DeMille considered his art to be masculine and claimed: “Everything this man does is strong” (Andersen, 1970, p. 201). Friberg also held similar masculine views to DeMille and claimed: “I believe that a tremendous religious leader like Moses or Jesus should be presented as commanding and strong, not a weakling or a victim” (Orrison, 1999, p. 66). DeMille’s desire for powerful presences also explains why Prince-cum-Pharaoh Rameses (Yul Brynner) was a strongly drawn character. He needed to be a worthy adversary of God-the-Almighty (voiced by Charlton Heston, DeMille and indistinct others), Moses-the-God-supported-leader (Charlton Heston), Nefretiri-the-wilful (Anne Baxter) and also be a worthy successor of the commanding Pharaoh Sethi (Sir Cedric Hardwicke) after his death and journey into the afterlife.

This power presence need also helps explain why actor Yul Brynner was chosen to play Rameses. As DeMille claimed: “Yul is the most powerful personality I’ve ever seen on the screen...a cross between Douglas Fairbanks, Snr., Apollo, and a little bit of Hercules” (Robbins, 1987, p. 64), in addition to Brynner looking “incomparably royal, masculine, and implacable” (Seville, 1993, p. 49) and “strikingly ancient Egyptian” (Searles, 1990, p. 18), all of which secured him this desirable DeMillean role. The wisdom of DeMille’s powerful depiction was vindicated by the box office success of the film, and yet again fifty years later by the failure of Robert Dornhelm’s Rameses (Paul Rhys) in the 2006 TV film *The Ten Commandments*. As film critic Yo (2006, p. 1) complained about this remake: “Pharaoh...was a simpering weakling who wasn’t intimidating at all. I had a hard time buying that he was the imposing powerful leader of one of the most glorious nations in the ancient world. Why Moses [Dougray Scott] was worried about confronting him is a complete mystery.” Whereas, DeMille’s powerful Moses suffered no such doubts on that score after accepting his Divine commission, thus turning Charlton Heston’s Moses into a cultural icon of manliness that still remains unrivalled today and into the foreseeable future.

The few times that DeMille did laud weakness was for cunning, honorable or romantic reasons. For example, in *Samson and Delilah*, Delilah was a physically weak woman who used her small size and vulnerable femininity as an asset to capture the strongest man in the world. As the Saran of Gaza (George Sanders) perceptively said to Miriam (Olive Deering) about Delilah’s (Hedy Lamarr’s) conquering of Samson (Victor Mature): “He was not captured by force of arms, but their softness.” Samson also demonstrated honorable-cum-cunning uses of weakness when he let himself be captured, bound and dragged off to Gaza by the Philistine soldiers in their first military encounter. He did not resist them and even feigned weakness along the way to lull the soldiers into a false sense of security. However, at the Lehi pass, after confirming that he had honorably fulfilled the bargain made between them and his
people, he burst forth from his bonds effortlessly and triumphantly slaughtered a thousand of them (aka Judg. 15:14-17). DeMille’s machismo also found a good home in his silent Christ film, The King of Kings starring a muted macho Messiah. It was a genre full of inherent problems that only the brave would dare tackle and even less could succeed in.

**Whom Say Ye That I Am?: A Cadre of Celluloid Christs**

“The portrayal of Jesus...is a perilous undertaking, subject to great moral outrage for any blasphemous misstep” (Beck, 2005, p. 27), thus needing delicate balancing due to Jesus’ divine-human nature (itself fraught with knotty theological problems). As David Jasper (2006, p. 591) explained: “the struggle by film-makers to preserve Jesus’ divine nature too easily detaches him from the rest of humanity, while the too human Jesus fails for the opposite reason.” Therefore, making Jesus fit the exigencies of coherent narrative drama and balance the battle between high and low Christology, whilst also traversing the well-known pageant of preordained events (i.e., his life, death and resurrection), plus market the movie Messiah to the masses, adds further filmmaking complications needing even greater skill to be artistically and financially successful. Since Hollywood Christology is inherently hard to do, historically speaking, there was frequent directorial reticence and an iota of industry inhibition towards inscribing Jesus on-screen, and if done, then usually in a subdued manner via back shots (The Redeemer), distance shots (Monty Python’s Life of Brian), by inferring his presence via reaction shots (The Last Days of Pompeii).

This industry reluctance partially explains DeMille-the-brave’s full-faced close-up of the Messiah (H.B. Warner) in his 1927 film, The King of Kings, which was his first freestanding and unencumbered Bible film (i.e., no modern, ancient or flashback storylines were tacked on). Furthermore, Jesus’ face was framed by an ethereal white halo whose hazy luminescence implied holiness. DeMille-the-showman wanted to stun audiences out of their visual complacency and force them to come face-to-face with the man whose compassionate countenance and glorious glow gazed down upon them eternally, whether from heaven, churches, museums, art galleries or items of holy kitsch found within everyday homes (e.g., statues, paintings, prints, cards, crucifixes—see Brown, 1975). It was a skilful balancing act between showmanship and reverence, the spectacular and the mundane, the secular and the sacred as DeMille built onto and simultaneously differentiated himself away from the usual portrayals of Jesus. Indeed, this powerful DeMillean cine-aesthetic tactic was not repeated again until the church sponsored 1954 movie Day of Triumph and their disappointing reconciliation of the mundane with the holy (Forshey, 1988, p. 801).

DeMille’s Christ film can be seen as the US equivalent of the German Oberammergau play, especially since DeMille failed to secure the film rights from the villagers in 1922 (and failed again a decade later—see Friedman, 1984, p. 150). As Jayne Loader (1997, p. 204) described DeMille’s opening scene: “We see a black screen and then a dazzling light, which resolves itself into Jesus’ face, wise and kind, looking down upon us, father to child, teacher to pupil. Our blindness is cured and Jesus is our first sight. This is one of the most spectacular and effective entrances in film history.” It is also “as close as some people have ever come to a religious experience” (DeBona, 2000, p. 61). Not surprisingly, The King of Kings was hugely
successful, frequently screened long after silent films went out of fashion, and was repeatedly praised by the public and critics alike thereafter. For example, William H. Cooper said it was “perhaps the highest expression of the art of the screen in the realm of the spirit that has yet been given to the world. All previous attempts to portray the Christ in the motion picture are dwarfed by the master role of H. B. Warner” (BYU, MSS 1400, CBD, Box 288, Folder 1, dated 28 April 1927, No. 98). Louise Trapper said: “The Christus of H. B. Warner, is an epoch-making portrayal. It will go down the ages. This Jesus is no molly-coddlish personage—It is a man of human understanding with God-like sublimity in dealing with his fellow men and women” (BYU, MSS 1400, CBD, Box 288, Folder 1, 21 April 1927, Letter from Louise Trapper to Revd. Dr. George Reid Andrews, p. 1). Mark A. Noll (1993, p. 606) saw “a diffident Jesus” whilst Peter Matthews (2006, p. 1) thought: “he comes through with a performance of absolute iconographic conviction.”

Concern over the depiction of Christ is of course understandable for religious, theological, political, ethical, historical and pragmatic reasons, especially considering the inherent difficulties and ideological battles over the sacred source material before projecting it onto the silver screen. The “Gospel accounts are certainly contradictory, partial and tendentious” (Reinhartz, 2006, p. 10) simply because:

The New Testament, the gospels, were neither biographical nor historical documents, at least as we in the twentieth century conceive of “scientific” history and biography, but rather they were faith proclamations, and the number of straight biographical details in them is limited. Clearly, the Gospel provides no physical description of Jesus. Further, the individual gospels are not always in agreement among themselves. At times, in fact, they seem to contradict one another (Baugh, 1997, p. 3).

However, Christian educator Dick Murray (1993, p. 97) claimed: “I have always been grateful that the New Testament never tells us what Jesus looked like. We do not know his build, his height, the color of his eyes or hair—nothing, thank God! Jesus’ looks can fortunately be ignored as people who are black, yellow, brown, and white come to love and worship him.” Yet, how do these very same multicolored people privately imagine Jesus and publicly worship him in their pictures, statues and jewelry? Are they true, valid and authentic images worthy of love and devotion? Furthermore, a film image of Jesus cannot avoid Murray’s delicious scriptural ignorance because it must make audiovisually explicit what may only be implicit in the Bible.

The above problems are also compounded by the Gospel’s telescoping of time, elliptic stylistic, episodic disconnectedness and gaping lapses in factual detail. Since the scriptural stress is usually upon Jesus’ spoken words, the concrete circumstances of his preaching, miracles and ministry are often ignored (Baugh, 1997, p. 3), but which filmmakers must recreate to tell their audiovisual stories. Moreover, the “Jesus of scripture and popular culture, like the Jesus of history and theology, has been drawn into the polemics and the politics of many of Jesus’ interpreters, readers, and consumers” (Reinhartz, 2005, p. 165), and therefore this fact has impacted significantly upon filmmakers’ aesthetic decisions in re-telling the greatest story ever told.
As a result, the popular cinema has not been backwards in coming forwards with its many cultural interpretations of Christ that either confirm, oppose or supplement these rival scriptural interpretations. For example, the movie Messiah has been portrayed as an ethical, non-violent, non-revolutionary in Ben-Hur, a pacific loner in King of Kings, a subversive in The Gospel According to St. Matthew, mystical and neo-Gnostic in The Greatest Story Ever Told, a humanist thinker in The Messiah, human and sexual in The Last Temptation of Christ, passive and neo-canonical in Jesus of Nazareth, a musical clown in Godspell, a counterculture hero in Jesus Christ, Superstar, a neo-airhead in Judas, accessible in Jesus, troubled in Jesus Christ, Superstar, patriarchal in From the Manger to the Cross, laid back in The Book of Life, spaced out in The Gospel Road, blessed-out in Johnny Got His Gun, gay in The Garden and Him, a borderline, psychotic loner in The Last Temptation of Christ, a murderous alien in God Told Me To, joyous in Matthew and a blood-spattered torture victim in The Passion of the Christ, which was dubiously dubbed “The Gospel According to the Marquis de Sade” (Matthews, 2006, p. 1) and was supposedly “a pseudo-snuff film of unbelievable mean-spiritedness” (Gibron, 2005, p. 2). Exploring the historical changes in the public’s perception of Jesus’ masculinity within these films would itself be very interesting and valuable, but beyond the scope of this piece.

The above interpretations strongly suggest that objectivism (whether biblically based or cinematically located) does not exist, only shades of subjectivism, or as Fr. Leclerc (Gilles Pelletier) cynically said in Jesus of Montreal: “[The Bible] can be made to say anything. I know from experience.” Therefore, every practical decision in a biblical film is a theological choice that either supports or opposes a belief stance, which in turn generates sighs of praise or cries of desecration because the filmmakers’ choices may or may not match the viewers’ personal biases, aesthetic preferences or theological understandings. DeMille experienced this same dilemma first-hand making The King of Kings. As William C. de Mille (1939, p. 244) reported: “Leaders of various Christian denominations gave him [C.B.] to understand that they held a virtual copyright on the New Testament...The matter was further complicated in that each one of these great leaders of religious thought differed radically from all the others in his conception of what should or should not be done.” Nevertheless, like all directors before and after DeMille, they made their cinematic choices and lived or died accordingly.

DeMille’s Sensitive, Handsome and Masculine Messiah
H.B. Warner’s portrayal of Christ within The King of Kings was virtue incarnate and variously considered “the sweetest, if not the softest Christ on film” (Sultanik, 1986, p. 238), “a triumph of sensitiveness and beauty” (Taylor, Peterson & Hale, 1949, p. 199), “a spiritually glowing, if slightly effeminate savior” (Phy, 1985, p. 13), a “somber, kindly, bland, fatherly figure” (Grace, 2004, p. 57), “upright, patriarchal, and somewhat distant” (Grace, 2004, p. 51). DeMille himself described him as having: “all the virility, tenderness, authority yet restraint, compassion tempered with strength, touch of gentle humor, enjoyment of small and simple things, a divine love of his brethren and enemies alike that the Man of Nazareth must have had” (Essoe & Lee, 1970, pp. 113-114). DeMille courageously employed the over-50-year-old actor H.B. Warner to depict his emotional, warm, friendly, stern, non-despairing,
fatherly Jesus in the tradition of God-the-Father, rather than the biblical 30-33 year old Jesus, the excitable son of God according to some views of Scripture. And especially considering that in Jesus’ day, a Jewish man was not considered to have reached full maturity and could not take on full adult responsibility until he was at least thirty years old (Gen. 41:46; Num. 4:3; 2 Sam.5:4; Luke 3:23). Yet, such was DeMille’s aesthetic skill that the aging Warner was perceived by Yael Ohad-Karney (2005, p. 191) as a “very human, loving Jesus, a nice, Nordic-looking young man” who was a “loving young man” (p. 194) [my emphasis].

At The King of Kings debut screening at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, many walked out in disgust, only seeing the salacious first half and not the pious second half (Higham, 1973, p. 177). This walkout was due to frayed nerves resulting from an annoyingly ponderous theatrical prologue, an 11:00pm start, and a long screening, thus leaving the fatigued audience in a foul mood (Beardsley, 1983, pp. 18-21). However, when screened under better circumstances in New York, it got rave reviews and it ran for over two years in Europe (Higham, 1973, pp. 174-175, 179). Of course, DeMille’s Christ film was not the only victim of negative reception or harsh criticism because scathing comments are almost a rite of passage for any exemplar of the Jesus genre (Reinhartz, 2007).

Nevertheless, DeMille-the-harmonizer solved his Jesus image problem in typical auteur fashion by mixing scriptural record, historical license and public expectations of a beautiful Messiah derived from fine arts masters. As David Shepard put it, the historical “Jesus was probably short, squat and Semitic, but he’s not in The King of Kings” (Lybarger, 1997, p. 3), yet, DeMille’s decision to use the aging and “supremely non-Semitic Warner” (Thomas, 2006, p. 2) was key to his success and greatly admired because it was a holy ideal. Historically, the “founder of the Christian church is usually portrayed in film as white, middle class and handsome. His Jewish faith has never been centre stage, and except for Pasolini his ethnicity has not counted for much either” (Leonard, 2004, p. 15). Indeed, Jesus’ Jewish ethnicity was comically highlighted in Monty Python’s Life of Brian when Brian (Graham Chapman), the mistaken Messiah of this Jesus film parody was stung to be called a Roman and so he defensively retorted saying: “I’m a kike, a yid, a hebie, a hook-nose, I’m kosher mum, I’m a Red Sea pedestrian and proud of it.” In addition to probably being short, squat and Semitic, the historical Jesus may have been ugly or deformed if one accepts the prophetic description of the Lord-to-come in Isaiah 53:2-4. Namely: “when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him….and we hid our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not…smitten of God, and afflicted.”

However, only extremely courageous or foolish filmmakers would dare portray an ugly or deformed Jesus, and by implication suggest an ugly or deformed Christian God if making a physiognomic interpretation of Jesus’ claim: “If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him” (John 14:7). DeMille-the-Christian-apologist did not take this alienating path. DeMille-the-businessman and DeMille-the-professional-pleaser knew that the public would expect no less than a positive, neo-perfect image of Jesus, just as Philip Yancey (1995, p. 87) discovered when he asked contemporary Bible students to describe Jesus. He found that: “Virtually everyone suggested he was tall (unlikely for a first-century Jew), most said handsome, and no one said overweight. I showed a
BBC film on the life of Christ that featured a pudgy actor in the title role, and some in the class found it offensive. We prefer a tall, handsome, and above all, slender Jesus,” DeMille-the-people’s-director included, or as Sonny said in Jeffery Deaver’s (2001, p. 115) novel Hell’s Kitchen, “the Vatican-approved, souvenir shop, Cecil-B.-DeMille version: lean, narrow of face, wispy goatee, long blond hair, hypnotic blue eyes. Skinny.” DeMille constructed the stereotype so well in 1927 that Myra Brekinridge mused in Gore Vidal’s (1977, p. 122) novel of the same name: “Could the actual Christ have possessed a fraction of the radiance and the mystery of H. B. Warner in the first King of Kings”?

As indicated previously, a key element of DeMille’s success was his full-faced, bravura portrayal of Jesus Christ on-screen, but his directorial audacity bothered Baroness Ravensdale who had visited the set. As she reported:

...Natalie Galitzine...and I and another Russian woman with a child pursued the eternal argument, whether Christ should be portrayed on the films or not, and that anyway it should be done by an unknown man, and not H. B. Warner, the famous New York actor. The woman, pointing to her child, said that she had a dream the night before, and saw Christ come out of a passage looking very sad. He met Mr. de Mille in his riding clothes who said he was going to put Him on the map again. Jesus smiled sadly, saying, “You cannot do this to Me”, and walked away in loneliness (Ravensdale, 1953, p. 71).

Yet, others enjoyed Warner’s performance, particularly the aesthetic close-up that thrust Jesus into the public consciousness and earned him a place in film history forevermore. As Carl King claimed:

H. B. Warner as Jesus. A beautiful performance. Haunting. Warner’s best, of course, but he doesn’t so much as seize the role, as fit right into it. We forget all about Warner the actor, as we see before us Jesus come to life. Warner not only has the saintliness and simplicity we associate with the Sunday-school Christ, but the vigor, the passion, the sympathy, the intolerance-of-corruption that were also the hallmarks of the real Messiah. DeMille doesn’t hesitate to use many close-ups because he knows Warner can truly transcend this scrutiny. (King, npd, p. 129)

Warner’s Messiah subsequently became the pop culture image of Jesus in its day and a leading prototypical Christ for decades thereafter. As Peter Matthews (2006, p. 1) claimed: “DeMille’s Christ is the serenely glowing effigy of stained-glass windows, plaster figurines, and a million dog-eared holy pictures. Despite the baloney (or because of it), The King of Kings captures the fervor of naive devotion. On that level, the movie is a genuinely uplifting experience” and thus greatly helped make DeMille “virtually the Sunday school teacher for the nation” (Beck, 2005, p. 27).

Conversely, others enjoyed the cinematic Christ but they were not as forgiving of the performance and complained about its kitsch dimensions saying: “Christ, as played by H. B. Warner, is static, other-worldly, dignified, and a trifle effete; he is a Hallmark-card Jesus, pious and untroubling. John Steinbeck’s epigrammatic reaction
was most revealing: “Saw the movie; loved the book” (Keyser & Keyser, 1984, p. 22). Alternatively, Warner’s Christ was seen as “a kindly, paternal figure serenely aloof from politics and society” (Hirsch, 1978, p. 65) with a face that “solidifies into its single, messianic expression, a kind of mournful, almost pouting unease...He’s the Man of Constant Sorrow” (Thomas, 2006, p. 3). In short, DeMille’s restrained, serene but sorrowing Jesus matched Philip Yancey’s (1995, p. 88) definition of “the Prozac Jesus.”

DeMille’s Jesus as Cultural Role Model

Despite the derogatory assessments, DeMille-the-pop-culture-professional had tapped into an essential scriptural truth about Jesus-the-human-being that is still greatly unappreciated today. As Adele Reinhartz (2005, p. 163) argued: “on the whole he [Jesus] is a ‘flat’ character. He does not develop over time, he does not change in response to events, and he keeps himself aloof from even his closest companions. In reading the Gospels, one searches in vain for the rough-and-tumble narrative world of the Hebrew Bible, with its vibrant, epic characters.” Therefore, DeMille’s “static,” “untroubling,” “aloof” Christ was more biblically authentic than one could have possibly imagined, and it had a remarkable effect upon its production crew during filming. As Fr. Daniel Lord reported:

Christ began to take over. It was a motion-picture Christ. It was a Christ of synthetic whiskers and grease paint. H. B. Warner was a good actor but by no means a great one...Christ was doing to the film what Christ does to all life, once He has been given a chance. He was so dominating it that no one else mattered. His figure was becoming so overwhelming that the other characters faded into secondary positions. He was the Great Man, the compelling personality...We were sitting watching rushes one evening, when Mr. De Mille leaned over and touched my hand. “He is great, isn’t He?” he said. “Warner?” I asked, pretending not to understand that he had capitalized the pronoun. “Jesus,” he replied. “He is great.” There was a long pause, and then he spoke very quietly. “I doubt if we shall need the story of Mary Magdalene and Judas.” I grinned at him through the dim light of the projector. “That is the wisest decision you have made,” I answered, and we turned to watch Jesus Christ, played by an actor straight from Alia’s-Jimmy-Valentine roles, walk through make-believe scenery and yet dominate the hushed audience of actors, technicians, and make-up people, who watched Him and hardly breathed. (Lord, 1956, p. 282)

DeMille had deliberately constructed his Jesus to be “magisterial” (Hirsch, 1978, p. 64), “rugged” (Allen, 1998, p. 186), “a living figure of super-manhood; not the cold, sad, almost effeminate Christ most other children were taught to worship” (Williamson, 1928, p. 67). As DeMille-the-man’s-man argued about his holy man’s man:

All my life...I’ve wondered how many have been turned away from Christianity by the effeminate, sanctimonious, machine-made Christ of Sunday school books. The Christ was actually a man with a body hard enough to withstand 40
days fasting and long journeys on foot and nights of sleepless prayer...There could well have been a note of admiration in the voice of Pilate when he said of Him: ‘Behold the Man!’ (Essoe & Lee, 1970, p. 113)

Moreover, his Christ was also a muted DeMillean self-portrait, a reflection of the “Spirit of the de Mille Studio...dignified, kind, and distinctly masculine” (Williamson, 1928, p. 71). It also reflected DeMille-the-people’s-director-with-the-common-touch for his Jesus was a man of the people who had no trouble associating with children, or in mending a little girl’s doll as a kindly act of service, caring and compassion.

In addition to DeMille’s doll scene humanizing the divine-human Jesus, it gently de-emphasized the sometimes heavy-handed importance of the Jesus narrative, which can take itself too seriously because of the cosmic importance of the man, mission and holy subject matter. As Gordon Thomas (2006, pp. 3-4) noted regarding the doll scene: “It’s all so nicely underplayed you can imagine Jesus thinking, You see? – not everything has to be such a big deal.” Or as Jack Jungmeyer viewed it in its day: DeMille “BUILDS JESUS FROM THE GROUND UP, RATHER THAN FROM HEAVEN DOWN” (BYU, MSS 1400, CBD, Box 278, Folder 8, circa 1927, Comment on King of Kings—Jack Jungmeyer). “For all the ‘humanization’ of Christ in more recent films such as The Gospel According to St. Matthew (1966) and Jesus Christ, Superstar (1973), this scene in The King of Kings seems much more expressive of Christ’s human personality” (McIntosh, 1982, p. 629). For Bill Gibron (2005, p. 6): “Unlike other Christs who seem, pardon the pun, holier than thou, DeMille’s Messiah is a completely three-dimensional entity, a near perfect epitome of consecration in human form.”

Tellingly, “H. B. Warner in the role of Jesus, was said at the time to “out-De Mille De Mille” (Koury & Thompson, 1994, p. 75), with Cecil’s dead preacher father, Henry, helping him shape his masculine Messiah because:

The Christ his father had made him see was a strong man, with a magnificent intellect, a swordlike wit, a keen, quick sense of humour, and a sympathy that reached up to heaven and down to hell. His Christ was not that meek,emasculated saint which so many old masters painted. Boys were ashamed to worship so dim a figure when, apart from religion, they were taught to thrill over historic heroes of courage. Cecil de Mille’s Christ was braver than any other hero of history. (Williamson, 1928, p. 68)

The conception of the Divine who “looks and behaves like a hero” (Ohad-Karny, 2005, p. 194) was also consistent with DeMille-the-auteur because the heroic element in his early films surrounded his “characters in a sort of halo, in a mysterious aura of myth” (Eisner, 1968, p. 212). Indeed, Jesus films cannot help but reflect their directors in some fundamental way. For example, the Christ of the courageous heterosexual DeMille was not wimpish, inhuman or gay, and was in sharp contrast to the gay Pasolini’s gay-like Jesus in The Gospel According to St. Matthew, which Pauline Kael (1987, p. 133) claimed was so offensive that she “could hardly wait for that loathsome prissy young man to get crucified.” Nor did DeMille-the-Episcopalian distort his Jesus like Scorsese-the-Catholic did with his excessively literalist The Last Temptation of Christ in which Jesus physically removed his heart from his body in an
episode not far removed from a gory splatter movie. On the other hand, the manly Mel Gibson did mirror DeMille’s masculine Messiah in his *The Passion of the Christ*. As Lisa Tyler (2007, p. 157) reported: “Gibson himself has conceded that he wanted to show us a different and more overtly masculine side of Christ than the usual Hollywood version: ‘He’s usually fairly effete and not a powerful presence, which clearly he must have been.’”

Unfortunately, H.B. Warner’s iconic Christ embodied a serious flaw when the pressure of “playing the role sparked off an old drinking problem, kept secret by DeMille and the publicist Barrett Kiesling” (Higham, 1973, p. 167) because adverse PR would fatally damage his pious project and quickly end DeMille’s career as an independent film producer. DeMille successfully managed the crisis, but the Hollywood-based iconography of the divine gaze inspired by Warner’s crucified Christ appears based more upon a drunken stupor than inner spiritual radiance or good acting (i.e., the vine rather than the divine). Maybe DeMille’s masculine Christ was more of a man’s man than anyone dare imagine or would want to condone today.

Indeed, some commentators playfully equated DeMille with the Messiah. For example, in a publicity shot for *The King of Kings*, “De Mille unabashedly fills in for a notable absentee [i.e., Jesus], surrounded by the twelve apostles” (Babington & Evans, 1993, p. 92), and when the Theosophical Society’s prophesized savior-figure, Jiddu Krishnamurti, visited the set: “An alert studio press agent had him photographed between De Mille and H. B. Warner…the actor who played the Savior. I [Krishnamurti] left soon after this...as I thought three Saviors on the same lot was perhaps a little too much” (Kobler, 1977, p. 229). The God-DeMille nexus was even more pronounced in his auteur role as a dictatorial director wherein he was sometimes referred to as “Almighty God himself” (Swanson, 1981, p. 93) with all the masculine power implications associated with that phrase.

**Conclusion**

So why bother with the holy screen at all? Because as the above has demonstrated, this genre provides a vast and fertile area of interdisciplinary research into gender, masculinity and religion studies, of which DeMille’s biblical epics are only a small but significant part. Not only did DeMille’s cinema exude strong resonances of masculinity via the deft deployment of strong actors, dynamic storylines and bravura character constructions, but he also infused them with his own cocky brand of damn-the-torpedoes machismo, even if sometimes deliberately muted for aesthetic or plot reasons. This intense artistic effort, albeit frequently ignored, derided or dismissed, and with only one scholarly English textbook produced to date (Higashi, 1994), self-reflexively created a key component of his auteur signature that helped make him the undisputed master of the American biblical epic and a *bona fide* Hollywood legend.

As a pop culture professional *par excellence*, DeMille’s films were eagerly awaited by the paying public. As a seminal founder of Tinsel Town and a co-creator of the rules of the classical Hollywood narrative style, DeMille’s machismo, coupled with his directorial longevity and prodigious on-screen output, enormously influenced the American sense of manliness. The subsequent effect of his virile persona-cum-ethos upon 20th (and now 21st) century culture is impossible to
calculate or safely ignore. Nevertheless, his masculine Messiah, take-charge Moses and marauding Samson came to dominate the biblical genre for well over half-a-century and are good examples of DeMille’s power over the public’s perceptions of what constitutes masculinity that would be professionally irresponsible or churlish to deny, especially *The King of Kings* which some critics still consider “the best Jesus movie ever made” (Grace, 2004, p. 48).

Of course, DeMille’s Messiah, Moses and Samson, all of whom had guts if not hunky abs, were not the only flickering reflections of DeMille-the-macho-man. Many of his female characters paraded these same masculine qualities on- and off-screen and are equally worthy of explication. Particularly, the devious Delilah (Hedy Lamarr) versus the courageous wannabe wife Miriam (Olive Deering) in *Samson and Delilah*, the willful princess-cum-Queen Nefretiri (Anne Baxter) versus the steadfast shepherdess Sephora (Yvonne De Carlo) in the second *The Ten Commandments*, and the holy harlot-cum-passionate penitent Mary Magdalene (Jacqueline Logan) in *The King of Kings*. Overall, further research into gender studies, masculinity studies, DeMille studies and the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film is warranted, highly recommended and certainly long overdue.

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Notes
1. There is not one DeMille persona but many DeMille personas who did numerous jobs and played multiple roles. His career was so long, complex and multifaceted that to describe, let alone justify each aspect would be prohibitive. Therefore, concise hyphenated compound terms will be used herein to help disentangle his various roles and avoid needless explanation, repetition or reader boredom.
2. Many scholars have spelled his surname as “De Mille” or “de Mille” or “deMille” however, the correct professional spelling is “DeMille” (DeMille & Hayne, 1960, p. 6), and so this spelling will be used herein, along with its concomitants “Cecil” and “C.B.” as appropriate. His other family members and relatives spelled their surnames sometimes differently and inconsistently.

3. DeMille was the biological son of a Christian father, Henry Churchill DeMille, an “Episcopal lay reader” (DeMille, 1990, p. 161) who studied for the church but was never ordained (DeMille & Hayne, 1960, pp. 12-13), and a “Sephardic” (Edwards, 1988, p. 14) Jewish mother, Matilda Beatrice “Bebe” DeMille nee Samuel (Edwards, 1988, p. 14), an “English Jew” (de Mille, 1990, p. 161). Consequently, Cecil has sometimes been described within the academic literature as a “half-Jew” (Herman, 2000, p. 18).

4. Although the term “masculinity” (i.e., maleness, mannishness, strength, boldness) and its concomitant terms “machismo” (i.e., a strong sense of manliness that encompasses courage, virility, strength, toughness, power, aggressiveness and an entitlement to dominate) and “macho” (i.e., assertive, dominating, aggressive manliness) differ slightly in meaning, shading and usage, and are susceptible to different constructions within differing theoretical models and contexts, they will be treated herein as essentially interchangeable terms used to add variety to the text.

5. The Authorized King James Version of the Bible (KJV aka AV) will be used because it was frequently used by DeMille, especially in his early days (Higashi, 1994, p. 180). Furthermore, most of “the biblical phrases that are embedded in our culture are from the King James Version” (Taylor, 1992, p. ix) and today it is still “the most widely used English translation of the Bible” (Taylor, 1992, p. 71).

6. Originally, “DeMille was insistent on developing a love story between Judas and Mary Magdalene, which was derived “out of some ancient and little-known German legend of the Middle Ages” (Birchard, 2004, p. 219), but the idea was eventually abandoned. Nevertheless, a significant echo of this relationship did feature within The King of Kings, particularly in the lengthy opening sequence.

Filmography

Day of Triumph (1954, dir. Irving Pichel & John T. Coyle)
From the Manger to the Cross (1912, dir. Sidney Olcott)
The Garden (1990, dir., Derek Jarman)
The Golden Chance (1915, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)
The Godless Girl (1928, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)
Godspell (1973, dir. David Greene)
God Told Me To (aka Demon) (1977, dir. Larry Cohen)
The Gospel According to St. Matthew (1964, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini)
The Gospel Road (1973, dir. Robert Elfstrom)
The Greatest Show on Earth (1952, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)
The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965, dir. George Stevens)
Him (1974, prod. Edward D. Louise)
Jesus (1999, dir. Roger Young)
Jesus Christ, Superstar (1973, dir. Norman Jewison)
Jesus of Montreal (1989, dir. Denys Arcand)  
Jesus of Nazareth (1977, dir. Franco Zeffirelli)  
Johnny Got His Gun (1971, dir. Dalton Trumbo)  
The King of Kings (1927, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
King of Kings (1961, dir. Nicholas Ray)  
The Last Days of Pompeii (1935, dir. Merian C. Copper)  
The Last Temptation of Christ (1988, dir. Martin Scorsese)  
Madam Satan (1930, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
Male and Female (1919, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
Matthew (1993, dir. Reghardt van den Bergh)  
The Messiah (1975, dir. Roberto Rossellini)  
Monty Python’s Life of Brian (1979, dir. Terry Jones)  
The Passion of the Christ (2004, dir. Mel Gibson)  
The Plainsman (1937, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
The Redeemer (aka Los Misterios del Rosario) (1959, dir. Joseph I. Breen Jr.)  
The Road to Yesterday (1925, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
Samson and Delilah (1949, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
Saturday Night (1922, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
The Ten Commandments (1923, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
The Ten Commandments (1956, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
Triumph (1924, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
Union Pacific (1939, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)  
The Woman God Forgot (1917, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)
Penina Uliuli is a rare and precious black pearl of the Pacific. This book uses its title as metaphor; its aim is to be a “precious, rare, and colorful resource” for the current issues in mental health of Pacific peoples. It is, of course, refreshing to encounter studies of Pacific people written by Pacific people themselves. It is also rare, precious, and colorful to find so many voices unified by their Pacific distinctiveness, yet reflective of their own unique cultures and experiences.

This edited volume contains nineteen contributions, consisting of mainly essays, but also interviews and poetry. The end of the book includes a substantial categorized bibliography pointing to further resource material in Pasifika mental health. Divided into four sections, the book covers the broad topics of Pacific identities, spirituality, the Pacific unconscious, and trauma and healing.

The first section, Pacific identities, contains five essays on how some Pacific identities are construed and their associated challenges. The beginning two chapters discuss the issues of Pacific youth identity, such as growing up within an urban environment in New Zealand. Identity is formed and can be nourished within a collective context including family and church. An approach to community-grounded mentoring programs aimed at Pacific youth is also discussed.

Chapters three and four deal with constructions of the Pacific male body, firstly from a Samoan perspective, and then a Tongan one. Because the topic of masculinity is of special interest to the readers of this journal I will outline these two essays in more detail.

Tavita Maliko explains how the idealized Samoan male body was altered from its traditional understanding when Victorian missionaries arrived and were horrified by the immodest clothing they found on Samoan bodies. Samoans now consider it culturally appropriate to cover much more of their skin, and even more so for special occasions. A full suit, for example, is considered the only suitable dress in church services, despite the tropical climate. Maliko reflects, “the implied message is that God does not want to see the human body, though it was created ‘in His image’”. Another myth inherited from the missionaries remains strong in Samoan culture: to be acceptable before God a man must cover his black skin with white clothing. Maliko, however, argues that the tattoo can be seen as resistance to colonization. Although the missionaries tried, they were unable to cease the traditional Samoan practice. Because of its extreme pain, tattooing is often linked with manliness. A man’s tattoos are thus exhibited as an outward sign of his masculinity.

Maika Lutui admits that Tongan culture has little understanding of reading physical bodies. What usually matters is the mind and soul; Tongans believe they
have a body but are not their body. Lutui brings himself into the essay. He remembers as a child being naked at home, until his sisters were born that is, for it was then shameful to be naked around his family. “Is the Tongan body sinful?” he asks “or is it holy because it is a gift from a Holy God?” Lutui then examines the Tongan male body in more depth. A haircut can display class and ranking, and bodily actions, like posture or the way one walks, is always interpreted through a lens of respect or contempt. In Tongan culture it is important for males to be “strong.” What makes a man strong, however, is not a “six-pack” or physical mass, but his ability to successfully carry out the manly tasks designated to him. For Tongans, Luiti concludes, a man’s body is valued primarily for what it can do.

The first section ends with a conversation between four women who share in an ‘afakasi (half-caste) identity. They describe their self-perceptions influenced by how others see them, and how this can lead to a sense of isolation.

The next section covers issues in Pacific spirituality. Pacific people tend to be very spiritual, an aspect often overlooked when working from Western models of mental health. These chapters approach the topic from different angles, from identifying spirituality as having integral importance to the mental health of Pacific people, to the problems of deifying culture, such as when cultural practices suited to island life impede on the wellbeing of Pacific people living in an urban environment. Chapter eight is a raw and hard-hitting testimony from an anonymous “survivor” of sexual abuse within a Samoan church. The author illustrates through her story that Pacific women must find their voices to speak out against injustices suffered within their communities. This section concludes with an essay reverberating some of the same themes, but with regards to youth suicide prevention.

The third section looks at the Pacific unconscious. What are some of the distinctive elements of a Pacific mindset and worldview? The essayists illustrate how the use of symbol, metaphor and mythology in therapy can help to connect with Pacific Island clients. If the sacred space between two persons, known as the vā, is receptive and creative then genuine therapeutic progress can be made. Furthermore, whereas Westerners tend to conceive of themselves individually, Pacific people have a collective interdependent construction of the self, which means that clients are likely, in a non-literal way, to bring more than just themselves into the room. The last contribution is a sequence of poems that illustrate one woman’s path of recovery as a victim of domestic violence. These chapters show how incorporating certain practices, and being perceptive to the worldview of Pacific people, can form bridges when working cross-culturally.

The final section, before the bibliography, consists of essays addressing specific mental health issues. The topics covered include domestic violence, problem gambling, and the relationship between colonization and depression and alcohol abuse. Many themes of previous chapters come out in a more specialized configuration. The essays also give some practical solutions for healing these potentially tragic aspects of Pacific communities.

The subjectivity and attached perspective of the essayists is definitely a major strength of this book. Each essay begins with an autobiographical paragraph in which the authors introduce their various Pacific identities. And while the contributors are readily equipped to avoid the pitfalls of assumed Western objectivity, their first hand experiences are written down carefully and critically, unafraid to analyze and critique
the sometimes negative aspects of their own cultures. This leads to an insightful read not only for Pacific people, but also those interested in learning how Pacific people see themselves.

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Academic research on African men is still in its infancy. The limited scholarship on this aspect of African studies constitutes a serious concern, not only because it seems to suggest that discourse on men and masculinities is not worth studying but also because of the enormous body of ideas and data left unexplored. The problem is also geographically relative. In other words, the largest chunk of existing work conspicuously comes from southern Africa, especially South Africa, while other African countries, like Nigeria, the most populous black nation on earth, probably has less than five scholars seriously working on masculinities.

Lahoucine Ouzgane’s and Robert Morrell’s anthology *African Masculinities* is aimed at bridging this gap in Africanist scholarship. Aside complementing Lisa A. Lindsay’s and Stephen F. Miescher’s edited volume, *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, the volume under review moves the state of knowledge forward by involving scholars from diverse disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, history, English, French, Spanish, education and health. By involving scholars from an assortment of intellectual disciplines, *African Masculinities* expands on the mainly historical themes of *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*. Historians, especially of the colonial period, will surely find *Men and Masculinities* indispensable while *African Masculinities* will appeal to the intellectual sentiments of the non-historian. While most anthologies on Africa (notably those on gender) often treat the northern most part of the continent as if it were not part of Africa (politically, geographically, culturally and otherwise), this volume has chapters on the North African country of Egypt. Readers are likely to appreciate the variations and commonalities inherent in African masculinities by comparing the North with other regions of the continent.

As diverse as the contributors’ fields are, *African Masculinities* generally aims at correcting the treatment of men as a unified category by emphasizing that concepts of masculinities change across time and space in response to internal and external forces. The ever-changing character of masculinities is also a reflection of the racial and ethnic diversity of the African continent and its history of colonialism, apartheid and neocolonial capitalist expropriation. In spite of Africans’ racial and cultural variations—Africa is home not only for blacks but also for Caucasians and Indians, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and adherents of traditional faiths—all African men, according to the editors, need to cope with the legacy of colonialism as they also have access to the dividends of patriarchy. In addition, all men, irrespective of class, age and other categories or paraphernalia of identities, have to contend with
the effects of the “new” globalization that produced new “global citizenship” and widened the gap between the have and have-nots.

The volume consists of seventeen chapters divided in the following four sections: (1) interpreting masculinities; (2) representing masculinities; (3) constructing masculinities; and (4) contesting masculinities.

Arthur F. Saint-Aubin opens the first section with a critical essay on the evolution of scientific and, what he calls, “pre-scientific” thought about African male sexuality. He dwells entirely on how the idea of African racial inferiority influenced the ways European and American naturalists, scientists, anthropologists and other commentators depicted African male sexuality and anatomy in their writings and experiments.

How South Africa emerged as a major tourist center for gay males is the central theme of Glen S. Elder’s chapter. Elder locates the trajectories of post-apartheid urban desegregation and globalization within the framework of new racial ordering. The new racial ordering produced a “spatially differentiated gay space that is mostly white, male exclusionary, classist” (p. 45). In another chapter, Beti Ellerson interviews Mohamed Camara, the producer of Dakan, a famous film on African homosexuality. Dakan demystified the myth of the absence of homosexuals in Africa and created for the “first” time a serious sense of pride among African gay males (mostly those in the Diaspora). It disavowed the idea that their sexual orientation is “unnatural,” as mainstream African societies profess. Ellerson’s interview with Camara addresses the social, sexual and political forces associated with the film and traces the extent of its reception.

Frank A. Salamone explores how the Yan daudu, “men who talk like women,” fit into the social, religious and cultural construction of masculinity among the Hausa of northern Nigeria. The Yan daudu’s spiritual presence in Bori, an ancestral Hausa cult, places them beyond the confines of men who have sex with other men. They dress and talk like women and serve as pimps of female prostitutes, but they are also a bridge between the old Hausa who practice Bori and those who embrace Islam.

Lindsay Clowes opens the second section with a chapter on the changing representation of manhood in Drum, a famous South African magazine in the 1950s and 1960s, and how it contributed to the changing perception of family and gender roles related to post-Second World War urban unionism and industrialization. The representation of black manliness in Bloke Modisane’s Blame Me on History is the main focus of Meredith Goldsmith’s chapter. Modisane’s autobiography is set against the background of the agonies that followed the destruction of Sophiatown, one of the few townships where blacks were allowed to own homes in South African apartheid, and the exiling of black South African intellectuals during the 1950s and 1960s. Kathryn Holland uses Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions to explore the dilemma men faced in the bid to satisfy white colonial hierarchies while, at the same time, leading resistant movements or serving as representative for their people concerning justice. Sally Haywood focuses on El Saadwawi’s depiction of Mayor of Kafr El Teen in the novel, God Dies by the Nile. The main point here is how the Mayor deployed his racial and cultural background for the purpose of imposing himself on the community as the “physical” and spiritual head.

In the section on “constructing masculinities,” Paul Dover, Margrethe Silberschmidt, Deevia Bhana and Rob Pattman examine how social and economic
spaces, like schools and villages, replicate and enhance the ever-changing masculinities of men in east and southern Africa. Silberschmidt challenges the idea that women are victims of men’s oppression by examining how men of some rural areas in Kenya and Tanzania are, like women folk, disempowered.

In the last section, “contesting masculinities,” Goolam Vahed, Victor Agadjanian, Robert Morrell and Marcia C. Inborn write on gender relations and interaction between males and females. Viewing gender as both a historical and social construction, it is argued that the division of people according to biological sex is rendered ineffective when trying to understand the pattern of gender relations in Africa. The idea of “genderless” Africa, which is the hallmark of influential works of Africanist scholars like Oyeronke Oyewumi, Ifi Amadiume and Obioma Nnaemeka, is reinforced in this last section, suggesting that imposing a Western gaze on African gender relations is like putting a square peg in a round hole.

*African Masculinities*, in spite of its contributions to Africanist scholarship, is not without some limitations. First, the editors seem to reinforce southern Africa’s “academic hegemony” in the study of men and masculinities in Africa (nine of the seventeen chapters are on southern Africa; Egypt has three chapters, while Guinea, Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania receive one each). Despite this shortcoming, Ouzgane’s and Morrell’s excellent volume is a veritable source for materials on African men and masculinities. Its transdisciplinary content will make it a useful tool for scholars in the social sciences and the humanities.

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Nathan Abrams

In her 1985 book *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray called for “reckoning with sperm-fluid” (p. 113). Taking this as his cue, Murat Aydemir, an assistant professor of comparative literature and cultural analysis at the University of Amsterdam, engages in what he calls this “long overdue” project (p. xvi). Specifically, Aydemir sets out to investigate how “ejaculation forges narrative” because, as he argues, “[s]emen changes the story” (p. xix). He seeks to demonstrate his thesis by tracing alternative narratives in various contexts, ranging from Aristotle to the contemporary artist Andreas Serrano, from pornography to Proust, and from Lacan to Bataille.

*Images of Bliss* is divided into five parts. Part One is entitled “History, Art,” and discusses Serrano, Aristotle, Georges Bataille, and Jacques Derrida. Part Two moves on to “Psychoanalysis” before covering “Pornography” in Part Three. Part Four, “Theory” seems somewhat of a superfluous misnomer as both theory and theoretical reflection, with reference to the currently fashionable roll-call of French (and other) thinkers, pervades the whole book, as befitting someone who is a professor of “cultural analysis.” Finally, Part Five, “Literature,” discusses Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. In between the passages of theoretical discursiveness are some very interesting close textual readings of the objects under study, whether art or pornography, and those interested in such areas will find much of use to guide their own work.

In doing so, Aydemir also manages to mention, albeit briefly, female ejaculation, particularly that which is known under the generic heading of “squirting” in hardcore pornography. He contrasts the female and male ejaculations within porn and concludes that “the sense of exhilaration and jubilation that surrounds” the former is “something conspicuously missing” from the latter which can be characterized as “terse, constrained, and deliberate performances” (p. 134). It is an intriguing comment and one worth extrapolating, not least because, as he points out, the female ejaculation is not only encircled by controversy, but also because the implications for the male cum shot, masculinity, and the ability of ejaculation (whether male and/or female) to “forge narrative” (to use Aydemir’s own formulation) are surely worth considering in more detail and depth. Thus, one might ask if the female ejaculation is merely a pornographic construction, or is as jubilant and exhilarating as he suggests, or if the male equivalent is as forced as he implies.

But, alas, the section is far too short (in fact it constitutes only one tiny paragraph in the whole book), and Aydemir seems content merely to direct readers, by way of a footnote, to an article by hardcore porn actress cum performance artiste Annie Sprinkle.
In contrast, and perhaps somewhat strangely, whilst still on the subject of hardcore pornography, Aydemir considers the implications of the “real” zero-gravity cum shot, as represented in the Private Media film, The Uranus Experiment (1999), and in significantly more detail than he does female ejaculation: almost eight pages (pp. 221-228). In particular, he details the somewhat hilarious attempts to “capture” (in all senses of the term) the resulting and disseminating sperm. He likewise spends more time discussing the autoerotic, masturbatory 1998 film Flyin’ Solo (pp. 216, 230-232), in particular its conflation of the two senses, in this context at least, of the verb “to shoot.”

Unfortunately, for this reader, however, issues of religion and spirituality in relation to men, masculinity, and the cum shot are not explicitly fore-grounded within this text. There is the odd, scattered reference, such as that on page xxii of his Introduction, where Aydemir cites Julia Kristeva’s observation that sperm, notably unlike menstrual blood, is not considered to be “unclean” within most religious hygiene rules. While I don’t want to criticize the book for being something I would like to have read but which it is not, this would have been, and no pun intended, a very fertile avenue of study. For example, how is this view of purity reconciled with the Talmudic utterance that semen is but “a smelly drop” — hardly a flattering perspective?

Furthermore, on the previous page Aydemir refers to Aristotle’s treatment of semen in his Generation of Animals, in which he described semen as the purest of all bodily secretions, to the effect that it serves as the vehicle for the spirit or psyche but which is, at the same time, encased in its physical properties of whiteness, heat, shininess, and foaminess. While Aristotle’s text is not explicitly religious, the spiritual possibilities of this notion could have been explored further by Aydemir not least for the influential ways in which Aristotle has influenced so-called “Judeo-Christian” thought. This is a shame for when Aydemir does engage in such critical analysis it is fascinating, as when he explores the story of Noah whereby his sons see and cover their father’s nakedness (pp. 176-180) or Babel (p. 187) or Adam’s Rib (pp. 252-254). These readings, drawing upon the work of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Marcel Proust respectively, provide a dimension not usually learned about in Sunday school, whatever the religion!

Overall, then, the book is too uneven for my tastes. Some of it is overly theoretical and abstract and too absorbed with critical theory at times, while at others it is lucid and engaging in its analysis of cultural artifacts, whether Proust or pornography. Nonetheless, there is much to be gleaned from this intriguing book from which much pleasure, or jouissance, can be obtained.

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